

A
System of Divinity,
in
A COURSE of SERMONS,
on the
FIRST INSTITUTIONS of RELIGION;
On the BEING and ATTRIBUTES of GOD;
on some of the most important
ARTICLES of the CHRISTIAN-RELIGION;
in Connexion;
And
On the several Virtues and Vices of Mankind:
with Occasional Discourses.

Being a Compilation from the best Sentiments of the polite Writers,
and eminent, sound Divines, both ancient and modern, on the same
Subjects, properly connected, with Improvements, particularly adapted
for the Use of chief FAMILIES and STUDENTS in DIVINITY;
and for CHURCHES, for the Benefit of Mankind in general.

Volume VII.

By the Rev'd W^m DAVY. A. B.

LUSTLEIGH, DEVON.

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System of Divinity

A COURSE OF SERMONS

on the

FIRST INSTITUTIONS OF RELIGION

ORDERED AND ADOPTED BY THE

General Assembly of the Synod of Kentucky

At a Session held at Lexington, Kentucky, on the 10th day of May, 1800.



Ordered by the Synod of Kentucky

That the following be the text of the first institution of religion, to be used in the churches of this Synod, and that the same be printed and distributed to the churches.

Resolved, That

Be it enacted by the Synod of Kentucky, That

Resolved, That

Be it enacted by the Synod of Kentucky, That

SERMONS
on
the several Virtues
and
Vices of Mankind.

"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy Voice like
"a Trumpet, and shew my People their
"Transgression, and the House of Jacob
"their Sins." *Isaiab.*

"Cease to do Evil: — Learn to do well."
Isaiab.

"Abhor that which is Evil: — Cleave to that
"which is Good." *Paul.*

"Add to your Faith Virtue." *Peter.*

SERMONS

ON

the Jewish Yoke

and

Yoke of Ministry.



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(*) The many Additions, made at different Times, to this Volume, occasion the Irregularity in the Pages of (the), and the two following Books; and also the Failure in the No. of the Sermon in this, and other Parts of the Work. But, fortunately, this will be no Detriment to the Reader in the Perusal, as the Additions were made, upon Consideration, for the Benefit of it.

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As nothing is more ingenious than the **Wit** of

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 Preaching: the One pretending that it is too ele-
 vated for modern Attainments, & prejudicial to the
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 of its present Practice. — And,

The Other asserts, that it is not preaching Christ,
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That it is agreeable to the Nature of Man, and
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 shall endeavour to prove: And that it is contrary
 to the Mode of the present Practice is the very Reason
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may afford Pleasure to those who love Books, as a Connoisseur loves a Picture, or a Virtuoso his Medals; yet they are, ~~mollysoftly~~ ^{really} ~~definite~~ ^{useful} Utility in the actual Conduct of Life. They assert, that a few practical and useful Maxims, collected from an actual Inter-
course with the living World, will be more service-
able than all the Wisdom of the moral Philosopher,
~~It is very certain, that a Knowledge of the World~~
~~as it is called, will teach such a Kind of Wisdom~~
~~will tend to advance Interest, and procure Connec-~~
~~tions, but still we maintain, that in itself, and, un-~~
~~controlled by moral Principles, it is a despicable~~
~~Kind of Wisdom; for it is incompatible with the~~
~~Ingeniousness of a good Mind. It inculcates a Sub-~~
~~mission to many Meanesses. It renders Life a con-~~
~~tinued Series of Deceit; and, indeed, so far from ef-~~
~~teeming such Wisdom superior to that which we~~
~~learn in Books, we cannot help thinking it a more~~
~~refined, and consequently a more execrable Species~~
~~of Knavery.~~

The Morality of Books is therefore necessary to
give this subordinate Wisdom Dignity and Value;
It enlarges the Views, and induces us not to esteem
our Interest at a higher Rate than our Conscience
and our Independence. It exhibits us to join, to the
alluring Qualities of an insinuating Address, the re-
spectable

spectable Odes of a manly Spirit and unshaken Integrity. He who sets out in Life with a mind unincumbered with error and Doubt; who, though he may probably attain Success, can neither be elated by nor adorn it, nor enjoy it; and who will yet be in Life with moral Principles deeply fixed in his Heart, though a degrading and dejected World should neglect him, will find in his Heart a Source of Joy, which the World, with all its Riches and Honours, cannot bestow upon him. They praise and not their Shame.

There is another Objection raised against the Efficacy of the moral Instruction of Books. The Moralist is accused of requiring too much, and of prescribing Rules, and of suggesting Ideas of Excellence, at which human Creatures can never arrive. With all his pretended Knowledge of the Heart of Man, he is said to be really ignorant of it, and to derive all his Conceptions concerning it from Beings who have not yet fallen. To learn such Wisdom as will be really useful, (say they,) we must shut our Books where Pictures are exhibited, whose Originals are not to be found in this sublunary Sphere. The Church, the Porch, the Lyceum, and the Academy, furnish only imaginary Notions. If you would attain Realities, you are obliquely referred to Places of Resort, to all the Pleasures of a vast

rice,

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rice, Fraud, and vicious Pleasure. These they add, are the Schools, in which Man is described, as he really exists; and in these the knowing Part of Mankind seek and find that Wisdom, which is vainly sought for by the Religionist in the Church, or in the Library.

It is true, that Books do indeed represent things better than they really are; but it is as true, that, in doing so, they do what they ought. It is their Praise, and not their Shame. They endeavour to raise human Nature, and they succeed in the Attempt; for, however bad the World may be, the Extremes of Wickedness are to be found among those who do not read, and not among those who have been educated in the Doctrines contained in the moral Philosophers, and whatever exalted Excellence occurs in the World, is produced by those, whose Minds have been cultivated by moral Instruction.

If things were to be described by the Moralists merely as they are: if only such Precepts were to be given by him, as tend to teach the young Mind how to deceive, & to practise those Vices which abound in the World, publick Degeneracy and Corruption, would certainly increase to a Degree which can hardly be conceived. Wretched indeed is Man without

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without the Assistance of a moral Guide; & wretchedness, and even infernal would be the State of Society, if Books were not continually employed in checking our precipitate Course to moral Degeneracy. We can hardly imagine what an Appearance Society would assume if Books were precluded; because we can never experience any thing like it in these Ages, where scarcely an Individual arrives at Maturity, without receiving some Instruction; either oral or written, generally derived from Books.

It is upon this Account that it hath been objected on the great Addition by Men of the World, that they could not approve his Writings, because, as they have said, he labours to render Men what they can never be. However,

We may venture to assert, notwithstanding this Charge, that more Good has redounded to the English Nation from the Publications of Addison, (so often recommended to in this Work,) than from the assiduous Labours of any one Individual, however high his Station, or powerful his Influence.

The Spectators have been every where read through the British Empire; and much of the Learning and good Qualities, which have appeared among us since their Publication, have been derived from them; as from others (1st), equally recommended to

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in this System of extensive MORAL Instruction.

No Books are more popular, (from the highest to the lowest Orders; and that the British Nation is not sunk to the Level of some of its Neighbours, is in great Measure, to be attributed to such Books of MORAL Instruction universally Read; in which things are, perhaps, represented better than they are; and the comparative Dignity of human Nature nobly vindicated.

It is from the erroneous Idea, that very little Advantage in the Conduct of Life is to be derived from Books of moral Instruction; that our English Sermons, which abound in the best Morality, enforced in the most powerful Manner, are almost universally neglected. They may serve, in their proper Place, to amuse, but are by no Means sufficiently efficacious to influence the Conduct of Life; and they, who either hear or consult them, consider it only as a Matter of Form, which very good Sort of People may attend to from Motives of Decency, and then return to their former Conduct unaltered and unimproved.

The End chiefly in View, in submitting these Remarks, is not only to recommend, as Alterations in Books and instructive Discourses, but to produce, if possible, an Alteration in the Scope and Objects;

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Attention: It is, that Readers may take up a Book with a Desire to receive from it moral Instruction, and not merely literary Entertainment. Every one of us, whatever are our Improvements, is liable to relax in his Principles, unless they are frequently renewed and strengthened by Admonition. Fortunately for us, Books of Morality abound: But alas! how few of us purchase and peruse a Book with a sincere Desire to be rendered better by it; & how want of Humility, and our Idea that Subjects which concern our worldly Interest and Pleasure are the only Subjects worthy the Care of a Man of Sense; render all which the wise & Good have collected for our Guidance utterly unnoticed and despised. What are the Books which Men in the Exercise of Power, and Men of Business, chiefly regard? Such as have a Tendency to facilitate the mechanical Parts of their Study; Employment too poor and mean things in Comparison with the Sublimity of Objects of Faith and Religion? Yet all Others they neglect or consider as trifling and insignificant, to young men, to suppose the Kind of those who have nothing else to do, but not worth the Notice of the Marquis, Senator, or Officer of the World. From such Men of thinking originates Narrowness, Intemperance, and Ignorance, the fruitful Parents of every Vice which

can render their Possessor miserable, and be injurious to Society. — But,

adly, Besides this Objection against the Refinement of MORAL Preaching, there is another, very opposite to it, [viz] that it is not adequate to the Nature and Spirituality of the Gospel, or, (in other Words,) it is "not preaching Christ the Lord," but Ourselves only.

Truth is, even abstractedly considered, a proper Object of the Understanding, and, upon the bare Theory of which it delights to dwell. They who apply themselves to the more speculative Sciences, and which have no Relation to the Conduct of human Life, sufficiently experience it. — And indeed,

It is but reasonable, in the natural Order of things, that our noblest Faculties and Pursuits should be attended with the highest and most exalted Pleasures. And we may, therefore, justly presume, that, in a future State, when all the Powers of the Soul shall act in their full Force, one Part of our Happiness will consist in pure Speculation, and in the Discovery we shall make of many sublime intellectual Truths, which have no immediate Influence on the Mind and Affections.

But, since this World is not a State of Reward

or Punishment to Men, but of Trial and Probation and the Rule by which we shall be tried at the last; does not so much relate to the Improvements we shall make in speculative, as in practical Knowledge, we are to judge of the Condition we are in with Respect to Futurity, not from our having bright and distinct Ideas even of moral & religious Truths, but from our practising the Duties of Religion and Morality in their full Compass and Extent.

It is, indeed, our Duty to acquaint ourselves with the Principles both of natural and revealed Religion, and to get the clearest Notions we possibly can of them: for, without knowing what we are to practise, upon what Motives, and to what Ends, we can practise nothing after the Manner, or to the Purpose we ought. Indeed, upon this Supposition, we should act very unreasonably, tho' our Actions might, perhaps, happen to be, in many Respects, good and reasonable in themselves. — but, Tho' this be granted, yet, nevertheless, those Parts of Scripture which are profitable towards enforcing the Duties of a strict Morality, are of more general Use to be insisted on, and brought home to the Consciences of Men. — For; There is a Difference between the State of Christians at present, and at the Time when Christianity was first

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first preached in the World. Preaching was ~~then~~ the only Means of converting Men to the Faith of Christ, and instructing them in the Articles of his holy Religion : For, "how shall they believe, (says the Apostle,) in whom they have not heard? and, how shall they hear without a Preacher?" — But now, that the Oracles of God are committed to a standing Writing, and the Key of Knowledge put into our Hands, there does not appear to be so great Necessity, on all Occasions, of explaining the Rule of Faith, as of enforcing the Duties of Life.

It is not, indeed, for Want of knowing either the Principles or Duties of Christianity, that Sinners ordinarily offend, but for Want of Consideration, or of being "stirred up, and put in Remembrance," after a forcible and awakening Manner, of what they know already.

The most ignorant Hearers will assent to what we say upon the Articles both of Faith and Morals; but, there is more Difficulty in touching their Hearts and in making them truly sensible to any religious Impressions. For, if our Knowledge do not tend to animate our Zeal, or our Principles to influence our Practice: — If, "while we have Light, we do not walk as Children of Light," the Abuse of these Advantages will only tend to inflame our Account, and

and render us self-condemned upon stronger and more notorious Convictions.

These are Truths which it is much more necessary to remind Christians of, than to prove formally to them. And, He must be wholly a Stranger to the Nature and Design of Christianity, who does not know, that Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel is an absolute and indispensable Condition of his being saved. "Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord;" and, in a Word, that "Jesus Christ is the Author of eternal Salvation to those only that obey him."

It is true, if we were to judge in this Article from the general Lives of Christians, we might be tempted to think, that a holy Life, and the sincere Practice of Religion, in all its Parts, is so far from being absolutely necessary to Salvation that it is not really of any great Importance to this End.

For, how little Conformity do we, in general, observe between this Faith, and Practice, between the Confession and Conduct of Christians? But the Answer is obvious.

— Now, in this corrupt State, (and several Reasons may be given for it,) do not always act upon Principle: There are many other Springs of Action, from their evil Dispositions and Passions, which make
bna them

them rebel against the Law of their Mind, and frequently carry them against the clearest Light and Conviction of their

The greatest Wonder, is, that there are Christians in the World who would destroy the Necessity of practising Holiness, even upon Principle; and, that it is even dangerous for Divines to insist so much upon Morals.

If, by MORALITY, is meant COUNTERFEIT VIRTUE, without the Truth and Reality of it, no such Morality is here recommended: but those Virtues only, which are sincere and real. — It is Righteousness and true Holiness, the sincere Love of God and our Neighbour, real Meekness, Patience, Humility, Sobriety, Charity, &c. and not the Shew, Appearance, and vain Ostentation of any of these or the like Virtues, which Men are here persuaded and pressed to follow after.

If by MORAL VIRTUES, the Objectors mean such as concern the Manners of Men, which are, in Truth, the Duties enjoined by the Natural or Moral Law, comprehended under those two great Commandments, the Love of God and our Neighbour — It is then affirmed that This Kind of Morality is the PRIMARY and SUBSTANTIAL Part of all Religion, and

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And most strictly required of all Men by the Christian, in our Saviour's words, "not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them;" and therefore rebuked the Pharisees, who neglected the great Duties of Morality, the weightier Matters of the Law, Mercy and Judgment, Fidelity, and the Love of God; by telling others, that "unless their Righteousness exceeded the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." And by that great Principle and Rule of moral Justice, "to do unto all Men as we would they should do unto us," He enjoins, as an essential Part of Religion, the Sum and Substance of our whole Duty to our Neighbour, and shall the Precepts contained in the Law and the Prophets.

So that MORAL Duties and Virtues are the same with Christian Graces, and that Holiness and Righteousness, which the Gospel requires, differing only in Name: they are called VIRTUES, in Relation to their intrinsical Nature and Goodness; & GRACES, in Respect to their being the Effect of God's Holy Spirit upon the Minds of Men.

In a Word, MORAL Duties are of primary Obligation, as being bound on us by the Law of Na-

ture;

ture; and Christianity hath reinforced and seconded their Obligations by more powerful Motives and Considerations.

All the MORAL Duties, inculcated in the Scriptures, whether in the Old Testament, by God himself to Moses in the ten Commandments, or elsewhere dispersed in the Pentateuch, or five first Books of the Bible; in the Historical Accounts following, or more particularly in the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, &c. or in the Prophets in general: Or in the New Testament by our Saviour himself in all his Discourses, particularly in his Sermon on the Mount; or by his Apostles after him: These all are our Precedents in this, especially St. Paul, who, tho' requiring Faith in the first Place, in all his Epistles, as the Root from whence every Virtue proceeds and receives its Value (*); yet does not

(*) The Gospel having brought us acquainted with the Son of God, requires Faith in Him. Faith in Christ may be considered, either as a firm Belief of what he hath taught us, or as a Dependence on his Attonement and Mediation for our Acceptance with God, notwithstanding the Demerit of our Sins & the Imperfections of our Holiness. Considered in both Lights, Faith is a Principle fit to run through our whole Lives, and to mix with all the most ordinary Actions of them.

All the Truths which Christ hath taught us in the Gospel, are Motives to the Practice of Holiness; they are constantly proposed in Scripture, as Incitements both to Holiness in general, and to all the se-

not forget to inculcate the Virtues which should proceed from it: and particularly, before Faith, as a seat to hear him concerning the Faith in Christ, yet did not wholly confine himself to this single Point, but reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and a Judgment to come: which had so large a Share in his Discourse, and were so warmly and effectually urged by him, that St. Luke hath not thought fit to take notice of any other Part of his Sermon. From whence we are naturally led to raise this plain, but profitable Observation, that the most Duties we are to practise in this Life, and the Rewards or Punishments we are to expect in another, are the chief Considerations in Religion which should most often and earnestly be inculcated by those who preach the Gospel, and be most attentively listened to and weighed by those who hear it. I shall make the following Scriptures upon it, as it particularly militates against the Prejudice of those who object against what is, (by Way of Reproach,) called MORAL-PREACHING, and MORAL-ARGUMENT. When the Nature of Good and Evil, Virtue and

several Virtues in particular. The Faith which the Gospel requires, is not a bare Assent to these Truths: It implies such a lively Impression, and such a permanent Sense of them, as may form our whole Temper to Holiness, and influence all our Actions; All the principal Virtues being but as so many several Branches of it. See Vol. vi. page 330 &c.

and Vice, are insisted on, & the several Consequences displayed, which, by the Light of Reason, are known to attend them. This they think is not to preach Jesus Christ & his Gospel; it is not to speak spiritually, feelingly and powerfully to the Hearts and Consciences of Men: But St. Paul (it seems) was not of this Mind, when he made Justice, and Temperance, and a future Account, the chief Subject of his Discourse before Felix: when he argued (as his Manner of preaching upon other Occasions shows that he did,) from Principles of Natural Religion, how great Reason Men had to practise the two first of these, and to believe and expect the latter; when he enlarged upon the intrinsic Beauty and Loveliness of those Virtues, and their manifest Beneficency to Men's present and future Happiness; and urged the universal Consent of Mankind to this Purpose, who had always acknowledged themselves to be under these Obligations; and accordingly as they did or did not fulfil them here, liable to be rewarded or punished hereafter. St. Paul, doubtless, thought himself all this while to be preaching Jesus Christ and his Gospel; & from the Effects we learn, that this MORAL-PREACHING of the Apostle was sufficiently powerful, awakening, and edifying: for it had such a spiritual Efficacy in it, as to make his Auditor tremble. Inasmuch

Inasmuch, that we doubt not to affirm that Jesus Christ is truly preached; whenever his Will and Laws, and the Duties enjoined by the Christian Religion, are inculcated upon us: And, tho' some are pleased to say that this is MORALITY: we answer, that it is SCRIPTURE, that it is Christian Morality; and further, that no Man ought to pretend to believe the Christian Religion, who decries its plain and positive Duties.

No Pretence to MYSTERY, and we know not what Attainments to the Knowledge of Christ! can exempt Men from Obedience to his Laws, and set them above the Virtues of a good Life. — But,

2dly, A second thing I proposed to observe from the foregoing, is the particular MANNER of St. Paul's handling these Subjects; *he REASONED,* (i.e) he treated of them in a rational Way, proving from the Nature and Tendency of those Virtues, our Obligation to practise them; and inferring from those Obligations, the Certainty and Necessity of a future Account, in which Notice will be taken how far we have or have not complied with them; and that we shall be rewarded or punished accordingly.

And, Can any thing be said more to the Advantage of a rational Way of evincing the Doctrines of Morality,

Morality, and the Truths of the Gospel, than that St. Paul practised it? He practised it, not on this only, but on many other Occasions. In his several Apologies for himself and for his Gospel, recorded in the Acts; and throughout his Epistles sent to the several Churches he planted, we find this great Apostle of the Gentiles continually REASONING; not merely proposing Doctrines in an AUTHORITATIVE Manner, by Virtue of his Apostleship and Commission from God, but proving and making-good what he proposes by Inference and Argument. — Thus he frequently did, and by so doing has sanctioned Reason to the Purposes of Religion, and shewed us that One Sort, (indeed the best Sort,) of good Preaching, consists in good arguing.

Some pious and well-meaning Christians have a very wrong Notion concerning edifying Discourses, and profiting by them. They relish nothing but what is addressed to their Passions, and set out with all the Advantages of a popular Eloquence and moving Delivery. By this Means, they find themselves inwardly affected and warmed; and this heating of their Fancy they esteem and call spiritual Edification. But when any Point of Doctrine is handled in a close and argumentative Manner, it appears flat and unflavoury to them, has nothing in

It of the Life and "Power of Godliness," and is all of it mere human Reasoning. But, herein they are widely mistaken; for it is a far greater and more useful Work to inform the Understandings, and convince the Judgments of Men, than to raise their Passions; and That Discourse, which is most instructive, and best supported by Reason, is certainly, if Men will attend to it as they ought, most edifying also. A vehement and voluble Tongue, a languishing Tone of Voice, a formal Look, a studied persuasive solemn Face, a pious Set of Phrases, or the like, will very powerfully move the Affections of some Sort of Hearers; but the Warmth by that Means raised, is momentary and vanishing, without any true, sound, lasting, or spiritual Improvement, and is, consequently, "the Sacrifice of Fools," as it convinceth not the Understanding, the Seat of Reason, which is the Foundation of all Religion. To compels THAT, the Way we find which the mighty & successful Preacher St. Paul took, was to REASON.

Tho' he was divinely inspired, and spake therefore as the Oracles of God, with an uncontrollable Authority; tho' he was endued with supernatural Powers, and could therefore have confirmed the Truth of what he uttered by Miracles; yet in Compliance with the Way in which human Nature and reason-

able

able Creatures are usually wrought upon, and more effectually to evince the Reasonableness, & Certainty of Religion, he REASONED.

An Observation of manifold and excellent Use! for it teaches us to reject the Pretences of those vain and fanciful Enthusiasts, who have framed a Rule of Duty to themselves, as contrary to the common Sense and Reason, as it is to the current Language of Mankind; so refined and sublime, as to be utterly unintelligible and impracticable. It is not to be learned or confuted, in the Method of other Doctrines: It is to be made out only by the Force of some unaccountable Impressions; by a Light that shines inward, and which cannot be communicated or discovered. But "we have not so learned Christ." On the contrary, we are assured, that we do our Lord and Master good Service, such as He will own and reward, when we apply ourselves to establish the Truths of our Religion upon Principles of Reason, and to argue Men into their Duty by appealing to NATURAL Light, to the Certainty of first Principles, & to the evident Deductions which may from thence be made by the sure Rules of Discourse; & that we are not to regard the Censures of those, who, on this Account, may stile us mere moral Teachers and carnal Reasoners, but will not allow us to speak
by

Introduction to the Virtues and Vices.

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by the Spirit, or to be at all acquainted with the Life and Power of Godliness: as if Religion were a thing designed not to be understood or explained, but lost somewhat of its native Majesty and Force, when once we come to REASON upon it.

Upon the Whole, The great Duty of a Minister of Christ, in the Discharge of his pastoral Office, is to show Men what they must do to be saved, and effectually to convince them, that, according to the Terms of the Gospel, (the last and highest Dispensation of Grace,) there is no other Way of being saved, or of "entering into Life, but by keeping the Commandments;" - and to this End, (as Faith without Works is dead, and hath no Power or Efficacy to save us, and it being a Matter of the greatest Difficulty to persuade Men to a Practice conformable to their Belief,) together with the FIRST Principles of Religion, and peculiar Doctrines of Christianity, most frequently, and with all their Zeal, (both in Season, and out of Season,) to inculcate the Practice of all Virtues, and press the Duties of an holy Life, "that the Man of God," (i.e. every good Christian,) "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works." — — —

by the Spirit, or to be at all acquainted with the Life and Power of Godliness: as if Religion were a thing designed not to be understood or explained, but left to newhat of its native Majesty and Force, when once we come to reason upon it.

Upon the Whole, The great Duty of a Minister of Christ, in the Discharge of his pastoral Office, is to show Men what they must do to be saved, and especially to convince them, that, according to the Terms of the Gospel, (the last and highest Dispensation of Grace,) there is no other Way of being saved, or of "entering into Life, but by keeping the Commandments;" - and to this End, (as Faith without Works is dead, and hath no Power or Efficacy to save us, and it being a Matter of the greatest Difficulty to persuade Men to a Practice consistent with their Belief,) together with the first Principles of Religion, and peculiar Doctrines of Christianity, most industriously, and with all their Zeal, (both in Season, and out of Season,) to inculcate the Practice of all Virtues, and perswade the Duties of an holy Life, "that the Man of God," (i.e. every Good Christian,) "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works."

SERMON CVI.

INFIDELITY.

Sin and Danger of it.

**Heb. iii. 12. "Take heed, Brethren, lest there
"be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief."**

As Discourses against Sin, in GENERAL, are of great Use; so it is likewise very necessary to level them against the particular Vices of Men, and to endeavour by proper Arguments taken from the Word of God, and the Nature of things themselves, to deter & dissuade Men from them (1). This carries Conviction immediately to the Conscience, and leaves no Way to evade. — And,

We cannot, it is presumed, better preface this Design, than by setting forth in a plain Manner, before all things, the Folly, Sinfulness, and Danger of INFIDELITY; how naturally prone it is to Wick- edness, which is the Supplanter of all "Peace and Quietness, and Rest, and Assurance, forever."

The

(1) See the ~~16th~~ Page of the Preface, Vol. I.

The Mind of Man, by attending to its own Constitution, and to the State and Appearances of the World, is naturally led into an Inquiry concerning the Origin and Causes of Things; the proper Measures of its own Conduct, with the Consequences of them; and to future Events, as far as it can attain to the Knowledge of them; (i.e.) to an Inquiry concerning God & Religion: And God hath been pleased to further and promote this natural Tendency within us, by the special and immediate Assistance of his holy Word and Ordinances. — For,

After the first Formation of all things, it pleased the Almighty Governour of the World, for the better Conduct of his Creatures, to have a standing Record made of all things, in Order to preserve a right Idea and Notion of our Origin, of his Being and Perfections, and of our Duty consequent on it, in Order that, in the End, upon our proper Behaviour HERE before Him, we may HEREAFTER be forever happy with Him — And,

That nothing might be wanting for our fullest Conviction, He hath, “thro Ages and Generations, confirmed it by Wonders and Signs following.

Nothing, therefore, can be more evident, even in the common Course of things, than that Infideli-

shall thwart this wise & benign Intention of our Maker, for his Glory, and our Good; and that it is not only our Duty, but Prudence also, and Interest, to examine things that we may answer the Ends for which our Beings were given us.

This is the Intent and Design of the Apostle in these Words: To further and promote which, I shall, (according to the usual Method of treating on Moral Vices,) inquire,

First, Into the Import of the Phrase before us, Unbelief, and the Nature of it.

II. The Causes of it. — And then,

III. Its Folly and Danger — And,

First, Of Unbelief, the Nature and Import of it.

That by Unbelief, in this and other Places of Scripture, cannot be meant that bare negative Want of Belief, which, with Regard to the Whole Gospel, is the Case of all those to whom it was never preached; and with Regard to any particular Doctrine whatsoever, is the Case of those to whom the Doctrine was never clearly made known and reasonably explained. For, Not to believe what a Man has not good and sufficient Reason to believe,

can never be so much as any Fault at all. And "the Judge of all the Earth will do what is Right," and "with Equity will He judge the Nations." And, "to whom little is given, of him will not much be required." And St. Paul expressly declares, that "when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law; these, having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves," and that their Uncircumcision shall be counted for Circumcision."

So that tho there is, indeed, "no other Name given under Heaven, by which we must be saved," but that of CHRIST only; yet, by that very Name may those possibly have Benefit, who never had any explicit Knowledge of Him. But by Unbelief, therefore, in Scripture, is always meant One of the two following things; Either,

1st First, Such an obstinate Rejecting (in general,) of the Whole Gospel and of the gracious Terms of it, as arises from a vicious and wilful refusing to attend to, and examine the Evidences of it; Or, 2^{dly}, Such a Disbelief of the PARTICULARS of God's Promises, in those who profess to embrace the Whole, as hinders them from obeying the Doctrine, which they would seem to receive.

The First was the Case of the Pharisees, in our Saviour's Time; and is Now the Case of all vicious Infidels in Christian Countries, who refuse to examine and consider the Reasonableness of the corrupted Doctrine of the Gospel; as delivered by Christ and his Apostles, separate from the uncertain Doctrines and Comments of Men.

The latter, was the Case of the Jews of old, who in the Wilderness were so often charged with Unbelief; and Now is the Case of all professed Christians, whose Works do not prove their Faith to be real. "they have pleasure in Unbelief."

As to those who wholly reject the Gospel, when duly and reasonably preached to them; That the Unbelief they are charged with in Scripture, is always a vicious Refusing to Examine; appears from all the Texts, in which such Unbelief is mentioned. For our Saviour, when he had declared to Nicodemus, that "he who believeth not in the Name of the only begotten Son of God, is condemned already;" immediately explains it by adding, "And this is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil." — And again, "I am come, (saith he,) a Light into the World, that whosoever believeth on me, should not abide

abide in Darkness? And if any Man hear my Words, and believe not, I judge him not;" Again, "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last Day." And "If I had not done among them the Works that none other Man did, they had not had Sin; but now they have both seen, and hated, both me and my Father." And the same thing is expressed in those other Places of Scripture, where Men are said therefore "to cast God's Words behind them," because "they hate to be reformed;" and that they "believe not the Truth," because "they have pleasure in Unrighteousness."

Hence it is, that the Expression, "NOT BELIEVING," comes, in the SECONDARY Sense, to be used frequently, not only for Rejecting the Whole Gospel, but also to signify such a partial Disbelief of the PARTICULARS of God's Promises, in those who profess to embrace the Whole, as hinders them from OBEYING the Doctrine, which they would seem to receive. So that, in Scripture, nothing is more common, than, (in like Manner as He is styled Fool, who acts not according to what he knows and understands; so) to call Him UNBELIEVER, who practices not what he professes to believe. — Again,

What our Saviour threatens of "appointing him his Portion with the UNBELIEVERS," is elsewhere ex-

pressed by "appointing him his Portion with the
 Hypocrites." — In like Manner, what in the Margin
 is translated "the Wrath of God cometh upon the
 Children of UNBELIEF," is in the Text itself, "the
 Children of DISOBEDIENCE." — The Jews in the
 Wilderness, tho' they could not possibly disbelieve
 what they saw with their own Eyes, yet for their
 Disobedience, they are in Scripture called UNBE-
 LIEVERS: "The Lord having saved the People out
 of the Land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them
 that BELIEVED NOT." And, "We see they could not
 enter in, because of UNBELIEF;" And, "To whom
 I sware He, that they should not enter into his Rest,
 but to them that BELIEVED not?" (i.e. as it is explain-
 ed in the Verse before, y^e them that had SINNED.) —
 Again, They entered not in, because of UNBELIEF,
 (i.e.) of DISOBEDIENCE. And the same Phrase is u-
 sed concerning their Posterity in the days of Holofer-
 nes, "They would not hear," (i.e.) they would not obey;
 "but hardened their Neck, unto the Neck of their
 Fathers, who would not believe in the Lord their
 God." And the Apostle applies it in the same
 Sense, to Us Christians, "O be not slothful, therefore,
 to as yet receive that Rest, lest any Man fall after the
 same Example of Unbelief;" in the Margin it is,
 after the same Example of DISOBEDIENCE. And
 see W. Serm. CVI. bna — "MAHARE"

in the Text, "Take heed, Brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of UNBELIEF, in departing from the living God;" (i.e.) as he explains it in the following Verse, in being "hardened," (as The Others were,) "thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin."

But, Secondly. Of the Causes of it.

The true Religion hath always lain under some Prejudices with partial and inconsiderate Men; which commonly spring from One of these two Causes, either the Prepossessions of a contrary Religion, or the Contrariety of the true Religion to the vicious Inclinations and Practices of Men.

The Prepossession of a false Religion commonly pretends two Advantages on its Side, (viz.) Antiquity and Universality; and is wont to object to the true Religion, Novelty and Singularity.

The ancient Idolaters of the World pretended their Religion to be ANCIENT and UNIVERSAL, that their Fathers served their Gods, & that the Worship of the God of Israel was a plain Innovation upon the ancient Catholick Religion of the World, and that the very first Rise and Original of it, was within the Memory of their Fathers; and doubtless they were almost perpetually upon the Jews with that peremptory Question, "Where was your Religion before ABRAHAM?" — And, When

When the Gospel appeared in the World, the Jews and Heathens still renewed the same Objections against Christianity, and branded this new Religion with the Name of HERESY. "After the Way," (saith St. Paul,) that you call Heresy, so worship I the God of my Fathers; believing all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets.

As to the Gentiles, they pretended against it both Antiquity and Universality, the constant Belief and Practice of all Ages, and almost all Places of the World. "We follow our Fore-fathers, who happily followed theirs." But you bring a new Religion, never known nor heard of in the World before. "And, when the Christian Religion was most miserably depraved and corrupted; before the Reformation, no sooner did LUTHER appear, but the Church of Rome made the same Objection to us.

As to the Point of Universality - If NUMBER be necessary, to prove the Truth and Goodness of any Religion; Ours upon Enquiry, will be found not so inconsiderable - those of the reformed Religion, (according to the most exact Calculations that have been made by learned Men,) being estimated not much unequal in Number. But then, if we take in

the Ancient Christian Church, whose Faith was the same with ours, THEN the Number on our Side, will be as great, much greater than theirs. — But,

We will not stand upon this Advantage with them. Suppose we were by much the fewer. So hath the true Church of God often been, without any the least Prejudice to the Truth of their Religion. What think we of the Church in Abraham's Time, which, (for ought we know,) was confined to one Family, and one small Kingdom, that of Melchisedec King of Salem? — What think we of it in Moses' Time, when it was confined to one People wandering in the Wilderness? — What of it in Elijah's Time, when besides the two Tribes that worshipped at Jerusalem, there were in the other ten but “seven thousand that had not bowed their Knee to Baal?” — What in our Saviour's Time, when the whole Christian Church consisted of twelve Apostles, and seventy Disciples, and some few Followers beside? — But,

What need I to urge these Instances? As if the Truth of a Religion were to be estimated and carried by the major Vote; which, as it can be an Argument to none but Fools; so no honest and wise Man ever made use of it for a solid Proof of the Truth and Goodness of any Church or Religion.

If

"If Multitude be an Argument that Men are in the Right, in vain then hath the Scripture said, 'Thou shalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil.' For if this Argument be of any Force, the greater Number never go Wrong. — But, believing that abso-
lutely, As to the Point of Antiquity. This is not always a certain Mark of the true Religion. For surely there was a Time when Christianity began and was a new Profession, and then both Judaism and Paganism had certainly the Advantage of it in this Point of Antiquity. But the proper Question in this Case, is, Which is the true ancient Christian Faith? And if it can be made appear, (as to an unprejudiced Mind it plainly can,) that we believe and teach all that is contained in the Creeds of the Ancient Christian Church, &c. was by them esteemed necessary to Salvation; then, though our Reformation was as late as LUTHER, our Religion is as ancient as Christianity itself. For when the Additions which other Churches have made to the ancient Christian Faith, and their Innovations in Practice are removed, That which remains of their Religion is ours. And what other Answer than This, could the Jews have given to the like Question, if it had been put to them by the ancient Idolaters of the World,
Serm. CVI. "Where

"Where was your Religion before Abraham?" but the very same in Substance which we now give? [viz] That for many Ages the Worship of the One true God had been corrupted, and the Worship of Idols had prevailed in a great Part of the World; that Abraham was raised up by God to reform Religion, and to reduce the Worship of God to its FIRST Institution; in the doing of which he necessarily separated himself & his family from the Communion of those Idolaters. So that though the Reformation which Abraham began was NEW; yet his Religion was truly ANCIENT; as Old as that of Noah, and Enoch, and Adam. Which is the same in Substance that we say, and with the same and equal Reason. (X)

As to the other Prejudice against the true Religion, that it is contrary to the vicious Inclinations and Practices of Men, and that it lays too great a Restraint upon human Nature, This is That which, in Truth, lies at the Bottom of all Objections against Religion, "Men love Darkness rather than Light because their Deeds are EVIL."

Men may pretend to other Reasons for their Infidelity and Opposition to the Truth, and may argue against the Principles of Religion with a seemingly honest Heart, in good Earnest, and against the Reasonableness

(*) It is obvious to every One, that there is a considerable Difference in Respect of the particular *Dispensations, Forms and Means of Religion* Men may be under. The same Degree of Light hath not been enjoined, nor hath the same Mode of Worship obtained from the Beginning. The Knowledge of the Messiah was gradually increasing, through the Antediluvian, the Patriarchal, and the Mosaic, to the Christian Age. And as one Dispensation, by divine Appointment, succeeded another, so each produced a Change in the Means of Religion, which grew more and more instructive and animating, the nearer they advanced to the Simplicity & Spirituality of the Gospel State. But this produced no Alteration in the Religion itself: That remained immutably the same. The Men of God before the Flood, "drank into the same Spirit" with those who flourished in the Time of the Prophets; and these again were saved in the very same Way, with those whose happy Lot hath fallen under

reasonable and Truth of Christianity, from so apparent real contrary Persuasion. But,

No Man that hath these things fairly proposed to him, with all the Advantages they are capable of, and who with due Attention considers them, but must acknowledge their Justice and Equity; that they are not only reasonable, but divine, and worthy of God; and therefore most worthy of all Men to be received. Men being no more able rationally to object against them, than they can find any thing worthy to be compared with them; and if any Man therefore reject the Truths of Christianity, it is not because he hath good and sufficient Reasons against them; but because he is swayed by some contrary Prejudice or evil Passion, which holds him in Fetters to a different Principle. (1) No Man can serve two Masters: Infidelity and Piety lead different Ways; we cannot therefore

hold
(1) It is impossible for any Man, who sees only the smallest Part of the Universe, to doubt of a free and supreme Being; and, by the Sense of his Wickedness, it becomes his Interest, there should be none. For certainly, there never was any Man who said there was no God; but he wished it at first, and from wishing to believing, the Distance was known is not great. When Men live as if there was no God, it becomes expedient for them, that there should be none; and then they endeavour all they can to persuade themselves so; and are glad to find Arguments to fortify themselves in that Persuasion; and rest in the shallowest that occur.

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As to the other Prejudice against the true Religion, that it is contrary to the vicious Inclinations and Practices of Men, and that it lays too great a the clear Light of the Christian Dispensation. The Gospel was preached unto the Fathers, as well as unto us; and "they did all eat of the same (spiritual) Meat, and did all drink of the same (spiritual) Drink; for they drank of the Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ." And though some of the wisest and best of Men in all Ages have differed in their Opinions concerning the Circumstances both of the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church; yet it would be the Height of Madnels; and we may add Impiety too, to question their Uniformity in the great Business of Religion itself. They all worshipped one and the same God; they all spoke of and believed in the same Saviour, and had all the same End and Hope of their Calling: "One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; One God and Father of all; who is above all, and through all, and in all."

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No Man that hath these things fairly proposed to him, with all the Advantages they are capable of, and who with due Attention considers them, but must acknowledge their Justice and Equity; that they are not only reasonable, but divine, and worthy of God; and therefore, those "worthy of all Men to be received." Men being no more able rationally to object against them, than they can find any thing worthy to be compared with them; so that if any Man therefore reject the Truths of Christianity, it is not because he hath good and sufficient Reasons against them, but because he is swayed by some contrary Prejudice or evil Passion, which holds him in Fetters to a different Principle. (1) **Y**et Man can serve two Masters; Infidelity and Piety lead different Ways; we cannot therefore

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hold to the One, and still cleave to the Other? Men cannot entertain the Truth, and retain their Lusts.

For the Truth of what is here advanced, we may appeal to Experience. View all these Scepticks in Religion, and see if you can find any, in all your Knowledge, who make any Conscience of observing moral Virtues, being chaste, temperate, and just. It is the Imposition and Enforcing of these Virtues which hath made the Christian Religion grievous and distasteful to such Men; not the Want of Evidence of the Truth of it. These Pretenders are seldom of such raised Capacities as to discern between true and false Reasonings with greater Accuracy than other Men; or to discover the Weakness of an Argument, which before their sagacious Enquiry was universally allowed. (1) They wilfully

blot (2) *Sapientum Obivus! Non plè: sapit quàm Sui mactata.*

Toto Quid errant, non Tertius a Clach. Secus. Cato. (1)

The Evidences of our Faith are so strong, that he would be esteem'd a Mad-man, who was not determin'd by much less in his secular Affairs. If any should attempt to disprove the Conquests of Alexander, he would be thought not to be in his *Sound Mind*; & yet there are much stronger Proofs for the Reality of the Miracles recorded in Scripture, and particularly in the New Testament, than there are for the Victories of Alexander, or even for the Being of such a Man.

It should no more stagger our Faith, that there are so great a Num-

betray their Judgment, or rather the Presence of it, to the depraved Inclination of their Wills; which that they may enjoy, they are content to undergo the Ignominy of groping at Noon-Day, and not discovering a Truth hid in so great a Light.

If Men are resolved to continue in their Sins, they are then, indeed, so far in the Right to persist in, and deny the Force of all Arguments against them; for, an Acknowledgment of These, would be a condemning of Themselves.

It is natural for every Man to defend himself, and to justify his Doings as well as he can; therefore, as he cannot reconcile his Practice with the true

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ber of *Unbelievers*, than it ought to influence our *Practice*, that there are so great a Number of *wicked Men*. — Besides,

We may be deceived, by mistaking *second Qualities* for *first*. A *Propensity* to think out of the *common Road*, may be by no Means the *leading Quality* among those that are *called Unbelievers*; It may be only a *secondary* one, and subservient to a *primary Desire*, that of being in the *FASHION*. — Those very Men, who *Now* affect to be *Unbelievers*, might, probably, if they had lived in the *Times of the grand Rebellion*, have set up for *SAINTS*; because a *reputed Sanctity* was as much the *Mode* of That Age, as *Infidelity* is of This. There is a *Twelve* of Opinions peculiar to almost every Age: Men of light, unbalanced Minds, like light Matter, are born down by the Current; & Men of solid Sense do not always meet with the Success which they deserve, in stemming and opposing it. — The Principles of Religion may be out of Fashion; but what they want in this, they make up in Weight, in Solidity, and intrinsic Worth. (Serm. CVI.

Principles of Religion; he endeavours all he can, to oppose them; and to frame in their Stead such Principles, as shall agree with his vicious Inclinations.

It would be too gross and shameless to assign the true Cause, and alledge that they will not submit to the Yoke of Religion, because it checks their Vices, restrains their Lusts, & forbids the Gratification of many beloved Passions. They would gladly be esteemed to act reasonably in shaking off this Incumbrance from them; and therefore pretend they cannot believe the Divinity of that Religion which lays it on them. These Men are Infidels in their own Defence, and merely to quiet their own Minds. — For,

A right Belief and an evil Practice are but unsuitable Companions, perpetually chiding and upbraiding each other. In doing wickedly therefore, we not only sin against God, but against our own selves also. (1)

He who believes the Principles of Religion, and yet is conscious to himself that he hath lived contrary them, and still continues to do so, how can he possibly have Peace in his Mind, unless, like Jonah, he can sleep in a Storm? and his Conscience be, as it were "seared with an hot Iron." If

(1) *Noli pugnant Dubius.*

His Conscience be awake, and in any Degree sensible, the evident Danger of eternal Ruin, continually suspended over him, must, in Reason, either force him to Repentance, or drive him to Despair.

If so forcible an Argument can make no Impression upon him, he is then lost to every serious Consideration. — Thus,

As Wickedness prevails, so Infidelity abounds. (1)

This was the true Reason why the Jews rejected the Gospel of Christ, because they were vicious in their Lives, and were unwilling to forego the Pleasures of Sin. This is still the Reason of Men's Enmity and Opposition to the Truth. It declares against their evil Deeds, and they are unwilling to leave them; so that having no other Way to justify themselves and their Actions, they condemn and reject That which reproves them.

This, therefore, is the Foundation of all Infidelity, "Men love Darkness rather than Light, because Their Deeds are evil." (2) — But, Be-

(1) Every inordinate Lust and Passion is a false Bias upon our Understanding, which naturally draws towards Atheism: & Men work themselves into Atheistical Judgment, by Atheistical Practices. — *Credula Res Amor est. — Facile credimus quæ volumus et, e contra, Fides difficilis, quæ obstat nobis.* — As Infidelity is the greatest Sin, so for God to give Men over to it, is the greatest Punishment.

(2) *Adversatur Tenebris Lucerna.*

The Atheist, conscious of his Sin and Guilt, cannot but know that his vicious Conduct must highly have offended the righteous Governor of the World, if such a Governor there be; the Consequence of which is greatly to be dreaded. And tho' "Sentence against him be not speedily executed," yet he knows that such a Delay is no Argument of Impunity. Hence he is led to wish in secret against God's Existence, and to persuade himself, as far as he possibly can, that it may only prove an imaginary Terror. And tho' the Proofs of the contrary are more numerous than the Sand on the Sea-shore, and clearer than the Sun at Noon-day; yet he shuts his Eyes, and darkens his Understanding, as well as he can; & thus perhaps deludes himself into some Degree of Atheism. — Now,

Supposing this to be a just State of the Case, we may readily perceive the desperate Folly and Stupidity of such a Proceeding; and that upon these two Accounts. — In the first Place, can the Nature of things be any Way altered by this Man's Wishes and Self-delusions? if they cannot, which he certainly knows, or may know on the least Reflection, what can he propose to gain by them? Should he be able to silence or evade, in some Measure, the Stings & Clamours of his Conscience; yet the final Issue & Event of his Wickedness will be no Way mended or mitigated by it: on the contrary, it will be rendered much worse.

But adly, As he trusts to a fruitless and unprofitable Expedient, so he fatally neglects the only secure and effectual Way of retrieving

Principles of Religion; he endeavours all he can, to oppose them; and to frame in their Stead such Principles, as shall agree with his vicious Inclinations.

It would be too gross and shameful to assign the true Cause, and alledge that they will not submit to the Yoke of Religion, because it checks their Vices, restrains their Lusts, & forbids the Gratification of many beloved Passions. They would gladly be esteemed to act reasonably in shaking off this Incumbrance from them; and therefore pretend they cannot believe the Divinity of that Religion which lays it on them. These Men are Infidels in their own Defence, and merely to quiet their own Minds. — For,

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As Wickedness prevails, so Infidelity abounds. (1)

This was the true Reason why the Jews rejected the Gospel of Christ, because they

his Condition. Instead of wishing and struggling against God's Existence, why does he not endeavour, what in him lies, to propitiate and pacify him? Is it not, in all Respects, his best and wisest Course heartily to repent and reform? Suppose a Man engaged in a Rebellion against his Prince, and accordingly apprehended and convicted; what Means would he use to extricate himself? Would he take great Pains to suppose, and believe, that there was really no such Man? or would he call in Question his Title to the Crown? certainly neither. Men very seldom act so stupidly in their secular Affairs. He would instantly make Submission, acknowledge his Crime, and promise inviolable Allegiance for the future. And why is not the same Method followed by Rebels against Heaven? Is not the King of Kings as placable and merciful as any earthly Prince? indeed, is he not infinitely more so? With him, sincere Repentance and Amendment is secure of Pardon; tho it often unavoidably fails and falls short with the other.

What Folly therefore, what Madness is it in the Sinner, however guilty, to amuse himself with idle Imaginations, and senseless Projects, instead of embracing the only safe & sure Means of Relief? To "say in his Heart there is no God," is to give the Lie to his own Conscience, & to contend with the whole Works of Nature throughout. And to wish there was no God, is the Wish of a Traitor, or a Madman; as including his own Ruin, and the Destruction of the whole World.

Besides this Interest of evil Men to oppose the Truth, I might mention also their Incapacity to discern it.

Men of HOLY Tempers & Lives, best understand holy Doctrines and things. Those, therefore, who have not the Spirit of Religion, are incompetent Judges of it.

Our Blessed Saviour hath expressly said, that "if any Man will do his Word, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God." (1)

We may, therefore, (by Parity reverse,) justly infer, that if we do it not, we are at a very remote Distance from any true Knowledge of it. As Honesty is the best Preservative, and sure Guide to Truth; so Wickedness, and unholy Living blind the Senses from all right Understanding. (2) This also

(1) *Nullus cujusquam Doctrinæ Cognitionem contingens potest, nisi quisque eadem et legat, et audiat, et simul ad Usum in Vita transferat.*

(2) *Quid Curio cum Speculo? Independentè judicat mala Conscientia.*
Splendorem non vident Improbi.

The best Way to become established in the Christian Faith, is to be diligent in the Practice of Christianity; to give the greatest Pains in subduing all irregular Affections, and in cultivating those which are good & worthy; in doing good, & bringing forth the Fruits of Righteousness. The purer the Heart and Life are, the more discerning the Moral Eye will be. And, as corrupt Affections bribe and bias the Understanding, and pervert the Judgment; so Purity and Goodness of

(1) *Nullus*

(Heart

also might here be enlarged on.

Let me not however be understood to assert, that all Unbelievers are without Exception absolutely wicked Men. There are some, no Doubt, who lead, what is called, good MORAL Lives. Yet, if you examine even these very strictly, you will, I believe, seldom find that their Virtue is so pure, so uniform, so extensive, so complete in all the several Branches of Duty, as that of a truly devout Christian. And it should be observed also, that Men may reject the Gospel, not only because they are dissolute in their Conduct, but for various other Reasons: because, perhaps, they are too busy, or too idle, to examine carefully into the Truth; because, like Gallio, "they care for none of these things," and like him, "drive them away" with Contempt "from the Judgment-seat," of their own Mind; because they give themselves up to a warm lively Imagination, and are impatient to shew that they have more Depth of Thought, more Freedom of Spirit, and Elevation of Mind, than the Rest of the World; because, in Fine, they are ambitious to figure at the Head of a Sect, to enjoy the delightful Triumph of beating down long-established Opinions, and erecting new ones; and finally, because they are too much attached to the World, to be able to leave it, and follow Christ. The Work, as immediately foregoing, is intended to remove Infidelity from all Men.

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(1) (2) (3)

(Heart)

ing upon their Ruins a little favourite System of their own. Now all these Causes of Infidelity, tho' less culpable than downright Prodigacity, are yet evidently great Faults, and indicate, more or less, a depraved Turn of Mind; and from Immoralities of this Kind, at least scarce any Sceptics are entirely free. Or, admit that some are; yet these Instances are confessedly very rare; & a prudent Man would no more chuse to embark his Morality on so precarious a Bottom, than he would venture to walk in the Dark amidst Rocks and Precipices, because some perhaps have done it, without receiving any Harm. In general, therefore, the Ground of Unbelief, here laid down, is undoubtedly a true One; and if a Man shuns the Light, it is an almost certain Sign that his Deeds are, in some Sense or other, in a greater or a less Degree, evil, and consequently his Condemnation just. (8) — Which brings me,

III. To shew, &c. (under)

III. To shew the Sin and Danger of it, which plainly discovers itself in its Confidence, without the least Assurance, and against the clearest Evidence, to its own eternal Ruin.

Could our Infidelity alter the Nature, and destroy the Reality of things, the Wicked might then well be allowed wise in their Conduct. — But,

As the eternal Purposes of God cannot be altered according to the Fancie and Caprice of Men, it is the utmost Folly imaginable to trifle with Temptation, and to act against the clearest Conviction.

Could we suppose that Religion was FALSE; yet, so long as Men please themselves in the Course of it, and so many present Advantages flow to Society from

Heart prepare the Mind for acting its Part with Impartiality, and for judging aright.

Get Wisdom, then; and with all thy getting, get Understanding, and practise Virtue: for, if you are so blest, as to have these for your Portion, it is not surer that there is a God, than that by Him all necessary Truths will be revealed to you.

Where Honour rears, Knowledge decayses, *Homo, alit Arias.*

See Vol. V. Page 436, &c.

(1) The Reader is desired here to peruse carefully the Sermons on the Proof of the Being & Existence of God, in the first Volume of this Work, as immediately serving to remove Infidelity from all Men.

Serm. CVI.

from the due Observance of it; surely, happy are all they that truly regard it. — But,

If true, (as we have all imaginable Convictions to assure us of it, both from the concurrent Testimony of Scripture, & the Completion of Prophecy and

(1) The chief Evidence of the Facts on which the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation depends, to us, who live at this Distance of Time, is the Testimony of our Saviour's Followers; which, in all its Circumstances, was the most credible, certain & convincing Evidence, that ever was given to any Matter of Fact in the World.

To make the Testimony of our Saviour's Followers a sufficient Evidence to Us, in This Case, there can be required but these three things. — 1st. That it be certain, the Apostles could not be imposed upon, *Themselves*. — 2^{dly}. That it be certain, they neither had, nor could have any Design to impose upon *Others*. — And 3^{dly}, That it be certain, their Testimony is *truly conveyed down* to us, unto this Day. All which things are, indeed, abundantly certain, and clear enough to satisfy any reasonable and unprejudiced Person. — For,

1st. That the Apostles could not be imposed upon *Themselves*, is evident from the *Nature*, and *Number*, and *Publickness* of our Saviour's *Miracles*. They conversed from the Beginning with our Saviour himself: They *heard* with their Ears, and *saw* with their Eyes; “they looked upon, and they handled with their Hands of the WORD OF LIFE.” (as St John expresses it.) They saw all the *Prophecies* of the Old Testament precisely fulfilled in his Life and Doctrine, his Sufferings and Death. They saw him confirm what he taught, with such mighty and evident Miracles, as his bitterest and most malicious Enemies could not but confess to be supernatural, even at the same Time that they obstinately blasphemed the Holy Spirit that worked them. They saw him “alive after his Passion, by many infallible Proofs;” He appearing, not only to One or Two, but to all the Eleven, several

and Testimony of Miracles, from the Force of our

Times, and once to above five Hundred together. And this, not merely in a transient Manner; but they conversed with him familiarly for no less than forty Days; and at last they beheld him ascend visibly into Heaven; & soon after, they received the SPIRIT, according to his Promise. These were sensible Demonstrations of his being a Teacher sent from Heaven, and consequently that his Doctrine was an immediate and express Revelation of the Will of God. — But,

secondly, It is certain, the Apostles, neither had, nor could have any Design of imposing upon Others.

This is evident both from the Nature of the things they did and suffered, and from the Characters of the Persons themselves: They confirmed what they taught, by Signs and Miracles; they lived according to the Doctrine they preached, tho' manifestly contrary to all the Interests and Pleasures of this present World; and, which Deceivers can never be supposed to do, they died with an imaginable Cheerfulness and Joy of Mind, for the Testimony of their Doctrine; and the Confirmation of their Religion. They were innocent and plain Men, Men that had no bad Ends to serve, nor Performances to hope for in the World. Their Religion itself taught them to expect, not Dominion and Glory, nor the Praise of Men, nor Riches and Honour, nor Power and Ease, nor Pleasure or Profit; but Poverty and Want, Trouble & Persecution, Imprisonments and Oppression, Banishments, and Death. — These things are not the Marks & Tokens of Imposers.

Besides, The Success, and the Equal of their Undertaking; that plain and illiterate Men should be able to preach their Doctrine to so many different Nations of different Languages, and prevail also in establishing the Belief of it; — that they should all agree exactly in their Testimony; and none of them be prevailed upon either by Hopes or Fears to desert their Companions; and discover the Impossibility, if there had been any. These things plainly show, that their Doctrine was more than Human, and not a Contrivance to impose upon the World.

uncorrupted Conscience, and the Consent of Nations, together with the genuine Purity of our Religion,) then, who does not see the Folly of Infidelity, and the great Danger of it?

Were Religion, indeed, and the Being of God, Matter

gally. It is certain, that the Apostles' Testimony concerning the Works & Doctrine of Christ, is, *truly and without Corruption*, conveyed down to Us, even unto this Day. For, they left this their Testimony in their Writings: Which Writings have been delivered down by an uninterrupted Succession thro all intermediate Ages. Their Books were translated very early into several Languages, and dispersed thro all Parts of the World, and have most of them been acknowledged to be the genuine Writings of those whose Names they bear, even by the bitterest Enemies of Christianity in all Ages. Passages, containing the most material Doctrines, have been cited out of them by numberless Authors, who lived in every Age from the very Days of the Apostles unto this Time: So that there is no Room or Possibility of any considerable Corruption, of the Truth of the Whole. — In a Word,

There is no Matter of Fact in the World, attested in any History, with so many Circumstances of Credibility, with so many collateral Evidences, & in every Respect attended with so many Marks of Truth, as This concerning the Doctrine and Works of Christ. Add to this,

That the peculiar Authority which we attribute to the Books of the Holy Scripture contained in the New Testament, is founded in this; that they were written and dictated by the Apostles themselves.

The Apostles were indued with the miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost: And this not only enabled to preach the Doctrine of Christ with Power, but also effectually secured them from making any Error, Mistake, or false Representation of it. And the very same Authority that, by this singular Privilege, was added to their Preaching, must, for the same Reason, be equally attributed to their Writings also.

uncomfortable.

Masters of mere Speculation only, these Men might
trifle and sport themselves with them, as long as
they pleased; but, as they are made FUNDAMENTAL
Parts of every Man's Salvation, they seem to be
too great a Hazard, for the bare Gratification of a
youthful Singularity, who endeavour to deny them.
For, as these Men cannot fancy things into Being,
which have in themselves no real Existence; so nei-
ther can they make those things that be, to vanish
into nothing, by the stubborn Confidence of their
own Imagination. (1)

SERMON CVII.

On the same Subject.

Heb. iii. 12. "Take heed, Brethren, lest there
"be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief."

Having already shown the Nature of Infidelity and
the Causes of it, together with its Folly, which dis-
covers itself in its Confidence, without the least As-
surance, & against the clearest Evidence, to its own
eternal Ruin: I proceed further to manifest the
Uncomfortableness of it.

Religion is reasonable, &c. — (under)
preserved? To what Cause can we ascribe the Good we enjoy? Or how
shall

Serm. CVII.

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uncomfortable.

Religion is reasonable; and, as such, reasonably accounts for all things; whereas Atheism (i.e. Infidelity,) wants a permanent Foundation, and centers nowhere, but in the Denial of God, & all that is Good; it substitutes no rational Scheme of any thing, but leaves us in perpetual Uncertainty, and levels us with the Beasts that perish." (2)

On the same subject.

SECTION CANT

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(1) *In Re tantâ nulla sunt respicienda, nisi confirmata et vera.*

We must go only upon Certainties in a Matter of so great Importance.

(2) If we inquire concerning Ourselves, our Constitution, or our State, present or future; as, How came we into Being, distinguished as we are from many other Kinds, by peculiar Powers and Privileges? The Answer is, "By the fortuitous Concurrence of senseless Atoms, or by a blind undesigning Fatality." — How do we live? How are we preserved? To what Cause can we assign the Good we enjoy? Or how

serm. CVII.

shall

To such, therefore, as are Sceptics or Unbelievers of the Being of God, it is advisable, (in the first Place,) that they consider how UNCOMFORTABLE their Opinion is.

If an Atheist be not sure there is no God, (and no Man can be sure of a pure Negative,) he cannot be without some Suspicion, that there may be one (1);

and shall the Evils we fear, be prevented? The Answer still is, "Nothing but Chance, or Necessity." — Again, If we ask, What shall become of us when we die? All the Answer, and all the Hope, upon this Hypothesis, is, that "Our very Being shall be utterly extinguished, and cease forever."

We have here no Room for the Exercise of Hope or Gratitude, our most delightful Affections. And! What a Discouragement to the Use of our intellectual Powers, either in forming, or pursuing laudible Designs in Life, the most agreeable Employment which the Mind of Man is capable of.

(1) It was good Counsel given to the *Athenians*, to be sure that King *Philip* was dead, before they expressed their Joy at the Report of it, lest they might find him alive to revenge their hasty Triumph.

The like Advice may be proper to Unbelievers; Let them be sure there is no God, before they presume to deny him, lest they find him at last to assert his Being to their Destruction.

No Man ever yet pretended to demonstrate that there is No God, nor No Life after this; For, these being pure *Negatives*, are capable of no Proof, unless a Man could show them to be plainly impossible.

Indeed, such Negatives as only deny some particular Mode or Manner of Existence, a Man may have a real Certainty of them; because when we see things to be, we may be sure what they are, and in what

Manner

and consequently the Denial of the Existence of his Being, which is of such fatal Consequence, must needs disturb his Thoughts and fill him with Fears; and qualify and alloy all his Pleasures and Enjoyments, even in this Life.

It is evident that such is the Condition of human Nature in this Life, as to be insatiable for itself, and its own Happiness.

We are continually surrounded with Evils, which we cannot prevent; with Wants which we cannot supply; with Infirmities, which we cannot remove; and Dangers, which we can in no Way escape.

Our Enjoyments are such, as are not for one Moment secure; our Expectations such, as are not in our Power to accomplish: We are apt to grieve for things we cannot help, and to be tormented with Fears of what we cannot prevent; wretched, indeed, must the Days of our Pilgrimage have been, were there not a God at the Helm of Affairs to guide and conduct them, and to be our Strength and Support in Time of need.

In Manner they do, or do not exist; but *per se* Negatives, such as *absolutely deny the Existence of things, and the Possibility of their Existence*, can never be proved, unless the thing denied to be, do plainly imply a Contradiction; from which the Notion of a God is entirely free. See the Reasonableness of a Belief of the Divine Existence, Vol. v. Page 26.

In all these Cases, there is no Substantial Comfort but in the Belief of a God, and in the singular Satisfaction of having Him for our Friend. (1)

How disconsolate and contradictory, then, must Atheism be? - for, (on the one Hand,) he who believes that there is a God, & lives suitable to such a Persuasion, hath an Interest in all his Perfections; hath "every thing requisite to Life & Godliness;" is provided for, in every Respect, both in this Life and a better; whilst, (on the contrary,) the Atheist is left to himself in the midst of ten thousand Accidents, with none better than himself to help him!

And! - How frail is Man! In the midst of Distress where can he fly? - to God? no; for he believes Him not. Whilst the former, (he who believes a God,) if he be in Want, is assured that God's Goodness will supply him; - If he be wronged, His Justice will right him; - if he be ignorant of his Wants, His Omniscience "knows whereof he hath need;"

(1) An unhappy Mortal, deep sunk in Miseries and Misfortunes, and struggling with innumerable Hardships here upon Earth, and at the same Time destitute of a Protector and Patron in Heaven, is a Condition not to be imagined without Horror, and trembling Amazement; Whereas, He that reposes and assures himself upon the Divine Protection and Favour, gathers Force and Faith, which Human Nature, in itself, could not obtain. Therefore, as Atheism is in all Respects hateful; so in this, that it deprives human Nature of the Means to exalt itself above human Frailty.

if he be in Danger, his Omnipresence will watch over him for Good; - be he insufficient for himself? God's Omnipotence will do all things for him; - be he loaded with Trespases and Sins? His Mercy will forgive him; - indeed, tho' he still persist to do wickedly? God is patient and long-suffering towards him, that he may bring him to Repentance.

"He is EVERY Thing to every Man: He is Redemption, Sanctification, & Righteousness;" (1)

Whilst the latter, (the Atheist's) Views are all melancholy & disconsolate; the best of his Hopes, and the Pride of his Glory, is, that as "he comes up like a Flower," so he must again be, one Day or other, "cut down like it," and rest in Silence for ever. Vain Man! how low, - how truly to be pitied! - by no Means to be envied, inasmuch as he hath no "Rock of Defence," - no "Anchor of Hope," - nor Haven of everlasting Joy, to put into, after the Storm and Conflict of Death. (2) - But!

And, Well would it be for him, in this Case, if Death were to make an utter End of him; but This, which is his Glory, will by Means befall him. No

Man's

(1) *O? et Praedium, et dulcis Decus meum!*

(2) Nothing has more Horror than Annihilation. The worst that good Men can fear, is the best that evil Men can wish for, which is the Dissolution of the Soul in Death.

Serm. CVII.

Man's Disbelief will alter the Reality of things.

(1) The bare Denying of God will not destroy either Him or them - but will rather more strongly increase his Fury against them.

Have we not a Chance for FUTURE Existence, as well as Annihilation? or if the Event be determined by NECESSITY, Who can tell which of the two is NECESSARY?

At the BEST, it is a miserable Refuge, and a most uncomfortable Consolation for a Man to sit down in earnest to deceive himself; to cheat himself of a Hope which every wise Man, in every Age has endeavoured to reduce to Certainty.

But, alas! he shall not be able to impose upon his Reason, by all his Sophistry. For let us allow him,

(1) There is something so pitifully mean in the inverted Ambition of that Man who can hope for Annihilation, and please himself to think that his whole Fabrick shall one Day crumble into Dust, & mix with the Mass of inanimate Beings, that it equally deserves our Admiration and Pity. The Mystery of such Men's Unbelief is not hard to be penetrated; and, indeed, amounts to nothing more than a sordid Hope that they shall not be immortal, because they dare not be so.

The Wretch who has degraded himself below the Character of Immortality, is very willing to resign his Pretensions to it, and to substitute in its Stead, a dark negative Happiness in the Extinction of his Being. But, as Annihilation is not to be had with a With, so it is the most abject thing to wish it. — What are Honour, Fame, Wealth, or Power, when compared with the generous Expectation of a Being without End, and an Happiness adequate to that Being?

him, that the boldest Libertine can demand, that all the Arguments which have been offered in Favour of a future State, are founded in Probability only: let us allow him, that there has been no certain Demonstration of it.

I am sure there has been, there can be none against it: and while there is but a bare Probability for it, there always will be a rational Ground for Fear. He shall fear, when, what he does not believe; indeed, his very Fear shall make him tremble: for, as he is a holy God, so is he also just and terrible; and will by no Means acquit the Wicked.

Well, therefore, might the Psalmist stile him "Fool, who saith in his Heart there is no God."

But, — He will say, perhaps, if there be a God, he must be infinitely good. Doubtless, he must; we allow he is: but his Goodness leadeth to Repentance. The Penitents are the Objects of his Mercy, the Obdurate of his Justice. However, since he cannot escape his Justice, he will depend upon his Mercy. Upon whose? Upon the Mercy of that God, whose Authority he has despised, — whose Laws he has transgressed, — whose Name he has blasphemed, — and whose Existence he has endeavoured to expel.

It is an uncertain and unsafe Dependence. Can

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He,

He, "who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity," be so irresolute in his Purposes as not to punish it? It can never be. — But,

For any thing that we know, (and by what has been already observed, it seems more than probable that,) the future Punishment of Vice may be as natural a Consequence of its Commission, as any necessary Effect of its Cause; and then we may conclude from what God does ALREADY, what it is reasonable to expect he will do HEREAFTER. Does he interpose by a Miracle to suppress the Fever which Men bring upon themselves by their Folly; or to support the Constitution which is decayed by Intemperance?

If not, why should it be imagined that he shall change the Course of Nature hereafter, in Favour of him who has already subverted it, in Opposition to his Laws?

These are broken Reeds; upon which, if a Man lean, they shall pierce into his Hand.

Driven from these Subterfuges, the Sinner is left naked and open to the Consciousness of his Guilt, and to the Dread of its Consequences.

What shall he Now do? — Whither shall he fly for Succour? or where shall he seek for Refuge? Shall he go to his past Life? — It reproaches him

with

with his Gaiety. — Shall he turn towards the fu-
ture? It threatens him with Punishment.

He can find no Joy, no pleasing Recollection
in the Past. No Hope, no flattering Expectation in
the Future. He looks backward with Remorse, and for-
ward with Confusion; Distraction presses him on
One Hand, and Despair recoils him on the Other.

"O! consider this, ye that forget God, lest he
pluck you away, and change his name to deliver you.
Consider, in this your Day, the things that belong
to your Peace, before they are hid forever from
your Eyes."

The present Existence of the Atheist, then, is his
All; and truly insipid it is, scarce having any En-
joyments above the brutal Kind; and these allayed
with Suspicions and Fears, which, even Brutes them-
selves have not; of which, indeed, they are not ca-
pable. All the Order, Proportion and Harmony
in Nature, which are so entertaining to other
Minds, are lost to him, regarded no otherwise than
as Chimeras. He sees nothing without him that
is excellent; feels nothing within his Heart, that
is generous and manly. Benevolence itself decays;
unsupported by any just Sentiments; tho' its Root
is too deep fixed by the wise unknown Author of his
Being, to be altogether eradicated; yet, the more he

views human Nature in the false Light of his mean Principles, the less amiable it appears. How is Humanity sunk in these unhappy Creatures, and the Dignity of our Being, indeed of all Beings, lost to them, thro' their affected Ignorance and Perverseness? Their State surely is not to be envied, but extremely to be pitied; their boasted Freedom, what is it but an Exemption from the Knowledge, & mental Enjoyment of all that is wise, and good, and great; which is the principal Happiness of the human Nature.

It is much to be feared, therefore, (as hath been already shewn,) that not Reason, but Ignorance and Irreligion is the whole Ground of their Unbelief.

Men, whose Interest it is there should be no God, wish it; and from wishing to believing the distance, (as we have seen,) is not great. "They are corrupt, and become abominable"; therefore, to quiet the Stings of a guilty Conscience, and reconcile themselves to their sinful Courses, they banish from their Minds both God and a future State. "Foolish Men that they are," as if God was the less, because they are the more wicked; as if God was not, because (as their Interest is,) they would not have him to be. But, "God sitteth in the Heavens over all, from the

Beginning: He reigneth, be the Heathen never so impatient; He is King, be the People never so sinful, or disbelieve him: yet be they never so unmindful of Him." (1)

Let not any profligate Person, therefore, who hath hidden Desiance to his Conscience, and is at variance with himself, think to take Sanctuary in Atheism, and because it imports him highly there should be no God, stoutly deny that there is any: for it will by no Means avail him, but he will hereby rather increase his Condemnation, and "treasure up to himself Wrath, against the Day of Wrath."

Had the Matter, therefore, really, in itself, any Un-

(2) To live at once under the Dominion of our Passions, and the Rebuke of our Minds, to be perpetually doing what we are perpetually condemning, is, of all others, the most wretched Condition: and it is no Wonder that any Man should strive to be delivered from it, or that those, who resolve to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin here, should wish to be delivered from the Fear of Punishment hereafter. This is a very great Temptation to hope that all their Fears are false and ill-grounded; & that Religion, from whence they flow, is nothing but the Cunning of Wile Men, and the Simplicity of weak Ones: — Since therefore, the Fears and Apprehensions of Guilt are such strong Motives to Infidelity, the Innocence of the Heart is absolutely necessary to preserve the Freedom of the Mind: Which, if duly weighed, is a good Reason why a Man, as long as he finds himself swayed by Appetite and the Pleasures of Vice, should suspect his own Judgment in a Matter where his Reason is so absolutely confined by Passion and Interest, and disabled from exerting itself to do its proper Office. (Serm. CVII.)

Uncertainty, (which is by no Means the Case,) yet it could not but be what every wise and reasonable Man must desire and wish might be true.

The Proofs, therefore, in Favour of a Deity, were they much weaker than they are, yet deserve to be seriously considered and attended to; because the Hazard on one Side, is infinitely great, if Religion, which we neglect, be true. For, Here the good Man's Comfort is, and will be, real; and the Atheist, however he may brave it out on Earth, whilst all things go smoothly on, will not be able hereafter so much as to lift up his Head but will be eternally abashed, when he feels in himself the dire Effects of his own Infidelity and Wickedness. — On the other Side,

There is no Hazard at all; if being received as true, it could at last possibly prove to be a Mistake.

For, To believe that there is a God, even tho' there was none, is altogether beneficial; and without the least Prejudice, as being the Principle from whence Men do good, and are restrained from Evil; by which no Loss is hazarded, but that of our Lusts; which are really most prejudicial to us; or, at the utmost, some temporal Convenience, (the Want of which is abundantly recompensed by the present Content and future Expectation it affords); & with-

uncomfortable.

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out which, it would be impossible either to live safely, or die comfortably. (1) — Whereas,

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(1) *Res in Vado est. — Pro Certo habet.*

The Belief of a God is the best Foundation of all Pleasures, and an entire Dependence upon Him never suffers a Man to be without Satisfaction in Prosperity, nor Comfort in Adversity. He is not without his Claim to a present Advantage, tho' of a far different Nature from that of the Atheist's; He proposes to himself the Satisfaction of a Man, those Delights which may entertain his Reason, nor his Sense, and which consist in the Rectitude of a well-informed Mind. His Religion is the perfectest Scheme of Morality, and makes him a Philosopher without the Help of Schools; It teaches him the Art of subduing his Appetites, calming his Passions, and, in a word, makes him Lord of himself, and by that gives him all the Pleasures which result from such a Sovereignty. A well-regulated Mind does not only taste Delights in the Enjoyment of any Good it receives, but also discovers Dainties in it, to thank his Benefactor for, and every Reflection it makes upon them affords new Matter for Satisfaction. Nor is he totally void even of the Pleasures of Sense, which, in many Instances, are greater to him than to those that most court them. Temperance gives his coarsest Diet a greater Gust, than all their studied Mixtures. Chastity in lawful Contract is more grateful to him, than all the nauseating Variety of their unbounded Lusts; And Contentment swells his Mite into a Talent, and makes him richer than the Indies would do, if he desired beyond them. Nor is it a contemptible Benefit that his Moderation gives him an Immunity from the sensitive Pains, which often bring up the Rear of inordinate sensual Pleasures.

So that his Condition, even set in the worst Light, in that very Particular, in which the Atheist most triumphs over him, is not so deplorable as is represented. Besides, even the utmost Sufferings, which Christianity can at any Time require, are out-weighed daily by the Effects of Luxury & Rage; And for One that has an Opportunity to be a Martyr for his God, Thousands become so to their Vices. See No. 186 of the Spectator, with No. 181. (Serm. CVII.)

To think there is no God, or could we only suppose so; yet, this can bring no Advantage, but is really to our Hurt.

Because it leaves Men equally liable to Crosses and Pains, to Fears and Doubts more abundant, (1) and finally to Death also; & leaves nothing to support and comfort instead of them, when every thing in this World fails and forsakes them.

So that, in all Cases the true Believer hath every Advantage before the Infidel.

In the most unhappy Circumstances of Sin and Guilt, Religion opens to us a much safer and more certain Retreat, than Infidelity can possibly afford, and will more effectually extinguish the Fears and Torments we labour under, and restore the long-forgotten Peace and Tranquility of the Mind: For, after all the Pains we can take with ourselves to close up our Minds, and to shut out the Belief of a superior over-ruling Power, and of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, we cannot be secure of enjoying long even the Comfort we propose to ourselves from it in this Life. We may not always have

Strength

(1) Cicero hath observed, that "No Kind of Men are more afraid of God, than such as pretend not to believe his Being." — These are the Men, who, above all others, are most liable to be affected with Dread and Trembling, (See Note (1) Vol. vi. page 419,) more especially in the Times of Sickness and Approaches of Death.

Strength enough to subdue NATURAL Sense and Reason. Any sudden Shock, either in our Health or in our Fortune, may disperse our animal Spirits, and all the gay Imaginations which attend them, and give us up once again to the cruel Torments of cool Thought and Reflection. Then will our Fears rally their Forces, and return with double Strength: Hell and Destruction will constantly play before our Eyes, and not suffer the least Glympe of Comfort to enter, nor leave us Courage to repent of our Sins, or to fly to our last and only Hope, the Mercy of God! witness the latest and bitterest Hours of dying Sinners! Hours of Woe and Despair! in which the Soul, conscious of its own Demerits, anticipates the Pains of Hell, and suffers the very Torments of it! in which it feels "the Worm that never dies," beginning to gnaw, and lies expiring amidst the Terrors of Guilt; without Power either to think of God, or to forget him! So that all that Sinners get by forming to themselves Resolutions of Unbelief, is, to render their Case more desperate; to cut off all Retreat to the Mercy of God, when the Day of Distress overtakes them, & to lay up in Store for themselves a DOUBLE Portion of Misery, both in this Life, and that which is to come.

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Since then, even the Hope which Sinners conceive from Unbelief in this World, that they shall undisturbedly enjoy the Pleasures of Vice without suffering under the Rebukes of their own Minds, are so very uncertain, and so liable to be dissipated by every cross Accident of Life, since they cannot alter their Condition, except for the worse, in the Life to come; it must needs be allowed that Sinners make a very ill Choice for themselves, when they sacrifice the Powers of the Mind to the Passions of the Heart.

As long as Men retain a Sense of God and Religion upon their Minds, there is great Hope that, some Time or other, Reason will prevail, and ex-
 erciate the Man from the Misery of Sin. Good Principles are the Seeds of good Actions: And, tho the Seed may be buried for a Season, yet, as long as there is Life in it, there is a reasonable Expectation of seeing Fruit from it, some Time or other: But, when Reason and Understanding are depraved, and as far corrupted as the very Passions of the Heart; and "the Blind thus lead the Blind," what otherwise can we expect, but that they "both fall into the Ditch?"

If a Man, therefore, had Argument sufficient to persuade himself that there is no God, (as he has in-

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finite Reason to the contrary) yet the Belief of so blest, so kind, & indulgent a Being, is so very necessary to the Quiet, the Comfort, and Satisfaction of our Lives, that a wise Man would be grieved and tormented to quit so pleasing an Error. If Religion be false it is a Snare, which, (we must own,) is laid with such Temptations, that we cannot avoid rushing into it: - What Majesty, What Glory are in its Mysteries! - What a Connection in all the several Parts of its Doctrines! - How very rational is it! - How candid and innocent in its Morals! Man, therefore, is neither presumptuous, nor vain, when he submits to these things, and owns the Advantages he has received: much rather might he be taxed with Blindness and Stupidity, did he refuse to be convinced thro the Multitude of Proofs which Religion lays before him, to show him the Greatness of his Privileges, the Certainty of his Refuge, the Reasonableness of his Hopes, and to teach him what he is, and what he may be. - Indeed,

If there was no God, or could we only suppose so; yet, it is confessedly best that it should be generally believed that there is a God, that we may be provided against the worst, & not be confident where our Opinion can do no Good, but really expose us to so much Hurt. - Especially,

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Since there is all the Reason and Proof that can be to assure us that there is a God; and the Belief of it hath so general and visible a Tendency to the Improvement of Life, and the Refinement of our Conduct. - making us happier and better Men. (1)

In a Word, — If the Grounds on which Religion is founded be false, the religious Man, & the strictest Observer of all its Precepts, even of Self-denial, ventures no more than the Loss of worldly Pleasure for a short time; but, if true, the vicious Man is, of all others, the most miserable; and we tremble at the very Thoughts of what unutterable and incomprehensible Torments he is daily heaping upon himself. (2)

“Take heed, then, Brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief, in departing from the Living God.” For nothing but an evil Heart, can make Unbelief desirable, or even supportable. For, to every good Heart it must be the greatest Joy, to know that the World is governed by infinite Wisdom,

(1) See Vol. II. page 229, 230.

(2) If we believe God is, and act consonantly, we shall be safe if He be not, and eternally happy if He be; Whereas, if we believe He is not, we are sure to be miserable forever if He be, and are only safe from being so, if He be not. If we should be disappointed, we are still no worse than our fellow Mortals; and if we succeed in our Expectations, we shall be eternally happy.

Wisdom, Justice and Goodness, and the greatest Affliction, to have any Doubt of it.

If therefore, we find the Thought of such a Governor unwelcome, if we could inwardly wish there was none; we may be assured, that our "Heart is not right." And tho' we could, with such a Disposition, bring ourselves, almost or completely, to imagine there is none: yet, what possible Security can our shutting our Eyes give us against Danger; or what Excuse can our wilfully denying God make for our disobeying him? — But further,

Infidelity is not only UNCOMFORTABLE, but PREJUDICIAL also to our real Interests.

To deny the Being of a God, is to do Mankind the greatest Mischief, and occasion to them the greatest Distress that can possibly be conceived. It is to abolish the grand Support and Security of human Society, and to overturn the Foundations of all Trust, Faith, and Confidence among Men.

Were there no Awe of a Supreme Being, no Terrors of a future Judgment to restrain us, what Government upon Earth would be able to maintain itself, or find Protection for its Subjects? Injuries & Outrages, Fraud and Falsehood, would prevail and spread far and wide, and the Iniquities of Mankind would know no Bounds. The Obligations both of the Governors, and the governed, would be loose & precarious. The One ruling, and the Other submitting, not "in the Fear of God," but only in the Fear of each other: the One unawed by any Apprehensions of any invisible Power, which might call them to an Account for Mal-administration; & the Other obeying not for Conscience sake, but from a Principle of Wrath and Punishment.

Take away the Belief of a God, and all Obligations of Conscience cease; and that Bond of Fidelity, that principal Guard and Support of Life and Property, an Oath, could have no Place at all. The solemn Appeal to Heaven for the Confirmation of Evidence, the Decision of Controversy, and the Prevention of Strife, would be thus a quite groundless and impossible thing. And how wretched, and deplorable would be the Condition of Mankind, was there no God for guilty Men to fear, or honest Men to invoke! no almighty & all-righteous Governor to protect Innocence, encourage Virtue, and discountenance the Insolence of licentious Men. There would

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indeed be left the Sword in the Hand of the Civil Magistrate; and great Occasion there would be for it: but yet it would, in a great Measure, be useless for Want of Direction. For how should evil Doers in this Case be convicted? No Evidence could be sworn, excepting in the Magistrate's Name; who might perhaps be deified for that Purpose. But unless he could also be vested with a Power of searching Men's Hearts, such an Expedient must be altogether fruitless. Evidence, in this Case, must be unsworn: & would it be either proper or safe to lay the whole Strefs of every Cause on Men's bare Words? which Rule, without the Supposal of a supreme Governor, might undoubtedly take place; but every one must see how fatal the Consequence would prove to all Societies. For on that Supposition, how small a Number of Mankind would deserve to be trusted? The Credit even of the fairest Characters would be very precarious: and as to the Generality, they would follow their several Humours and Interests without Remorse or Controul. Where there is no Obligation of Conscience, &c. (under)

Obligation of Conscience, all Security of Truth and Justice and mutual Confidence among Men is at an End. For why should I repose Confidence in THAT Man, why should I take his Word, or believe his Promise, or put any of my Interests and Concernments into his Power, who hath no other Restraint upon him but that of human Laws, and is at Liberty in his own Mind and Principles to do whatever he judgeth to be expedient for his Interest, provided

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he can do it without Danger to himself? (1)

It is in vain here to pretend the Phantom of Honour to supply the Defects of human Laws, and moral Virtue, with Regard to the common Good and Happiness of Society: For indeed, to an Atheist who denies there is any intrinsic Goodness in moral Virtue, or Evil in Sin, and will have the Distinction between them to be purely arbitrary and nominal, to such a Man there can be no such thing as Honour. It is indeed a good Word, and sounds well; but what can the Atheist, who makes a Jest of Virtue, and of all the Motives proper to render Men virtuous, mean by it? - Nothing certainly but Humour

(1) If there be no Tye upon Conscience, how many Opportunities have Men of doing ill things, notwithstanding the Authority of human Laws? It is certain, that Pride and Envy, Covetousness and Ingratitude, are the secret Springs of almost all the Contempt and Injury which are done to other Men; and yet, as to these, and innumerable other Vices, Human Laws leave every Man to be a Law to himself, and permit him to do that which is right in his own Eyes: - The Law of God and Religion do only restrain them. — But this is not all,

The Eye of the Civil Magistrate is not in every Place; beholding the Evil and the Good. Men are often guilty of high Crimes, which render them obnoxious to the Laws, without being discovered; or, if they be in a great Measure detected, something may still be wanting in the Forms of a legal Proof, concerning what they are charged with; or, if the Fact be proved upon them, it is not always impossible to evade the Sentence, or at least, the Execution of it. It is of the utmost Consequence, therefore, to cultivate Religion, which hath so great and general Influence upon all the Actions of Men.

Humour, or at most, a decent Compliyance with what is generally esteemed by Mankind, commendable and praise-worthy. But then,

Even this Reason can oblige him to a Conduct that is reputed honourable, no longer than he can, upon some private Views, engage in the most dishonourable Designs without being found out.

It is certain, a natural Firmness, or Generosity of Mind will carry a Man a great Way in all the Appearances of Honour; but, it is not to be relied on in Extremities. Nothing under Circumstances of strong and violent Temptations can secure the Purity or Innocence of Men, but a due Regard to the Law of Moral Virtue; especially, if we take in the Sanction, which God himself has, in his revealed Will, given to them. (*)

Honour, therefore, in the Mouth of any Person who laughs at the Distinction of Moral Virtue must be put to the Account of a great many other good Words, which are very common in the World, and in all Manner of Conversation; tho' without any proper or determinate Sense, (ordinarily annexed to them, &c.) So that declared Atheism and Infidelity doth justly bring Men under a Jealousy & Suspicion with all Mankind; and every wise Man hath Reason to be upon his Guard against those, from whom

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(*) Notwithstanding the Atheist's Plea, that Virtue is amiable and worthy, and even beneficial in its own Nature; and as such, might influence, and incline, and oblige the Atheists themselves: and that Vice is odious, deformed, and destructive, & therefore to be avoided; yet considering the known Corruptions & Degenerations of Mankind, these Considerations are by no Means sufficient to keep them in Order, and secure the Peace of the World, without a sovereign Legislator, & the prevailing Sanctions of Reward and Punishment.

To be directed merely by the Rules of Right Reason, and influenced by the Charms of Virtue alone, requires greater Integrity of Mind, a more excellent Disposition, and perhaps a more elegant and re-

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Honour, therefore, in the Mouth of any Person who laughs at the Distinction of Moral Virtue must be put to the Account of a great many other good Words, which are very common in the World, and in all Manner of Conversation. It is not a refined Taste, than can ever be expected from the Bulk of Mankind. They are all capable of being moved by Hopes and Fears; by the Apprehensions of final Happiness or Misery. The Attractions of moral Beauty, and virtuous Excellence may, in some Measure, prevail with a few select Spirits; at least while nothing appears in Opposition to them; but in the Day of fierce Trial and strong Temptation, it is not to be supposed that mere unsupported Virtue should be able to bear up without the Supports of Religion; which at best must be very weak & uncertain, in Comparison of that which springs from Religion; and is connected with it.

he hath no Cause to expect more Justice and Truth and Equity in their Dealings than he can compel them to by the mere Dint and Force of Laws. For by declaring themselves free from all other Obligations, they give us fair Warning what we are to expect at their Hands, and how far we may trust them. Religion is the strongest Band of human Society, and so necessary to the Welfare and Happiness of Mankind, as it could not have been more, if we could suppose the Being of God himself to have been purposely designed and contrived for the Benefit and Advantage of Men.

Atheism is by no Means tolerable in the most private Condition: but if it aspire to Authority and Power; if it acquire the Command of an Army or a Naval Force; if it get upon the Bench, or into the Senate, or on a Throne: what then can be expected but the basest Cowardice and Treachery, but the foulest Prevarication in Justice, but betraying and selling the Rights and Liberties of a People, but arbitrary Government and tyrannical Oppression;

If Atheism were once the national Religion, it would make its own Followers the most miserable of Men; it would be the Kingdom of Satan divided against itself; and the Land would soon be brought to Desolation.

No Atheist, as such, can be a true Friend, an affectionate Relation, or a loyal Subject. The Appearance and Show of mutual Amity among them, is wholly owing to the Smallness of their Number, and to the Obligations of a Faction. It is like the Friendship

fections; and Arts, and Conveniencies of Life, all that is laudible and valuable in the World. Society could not subsist; or if it did, it would be worse than any Solitude. As no Government upon Earth could answer the Purpose of its Institution, so the principal Blessings and Comforts of Life would be utterly destroyed. No Man could safely rely either on his Fellow-creatures, or himself; but mutual Jealousies and universal Suspicions would produce endless Divisions, Contentions and Animosities, to the total Subversion of every thing good and desirable in Life. — But further,

Abstracting from Society and Government, we may go on to consider, (besides the general View we have already taken of the comfortless State of Atheism,) how the Minds and Conditions of private Persons would be affected by the Supposition of a forlorn and fatherless World.

As under the Tutition and Government of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, every thing appears with a comfortable Aspect; so every Blessing of Life is furthered and promoted by it. As Men never need to want the purest Comforts, & most perfect Satisfaction, while God is their Portion; so they make the best of every Occurrence that befalls them. As from Him cometh not only every good and perfect Gift

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which we possess at present ; but also those pleasing Hopes and joyful Prospects which sweeten the Cares and Toils of Life, and lie at the Bottom of all our Enjoyments ; so they apply them to the best Advantages. On this Account, whether the World frown or smile, the wise Man is neither highly transported, nor deeply dejected. Whatever be his Lot, the Peace of his Mind is secured, and his Heart is at Rest. For his Hopes are founded on a Rock, and his Treasure fixed where nothing can touch it : whereas, Atheism, (as we have seen,) reverses every thing ; blackens the whole Face of Nature, and involves human Life in Darkness and Despair. Its better things would yield no Contentment, and its worse admit of no Consolation : or, in other Words, Adversity would be insupportable, and Prosperity joyless. Prosperity ! the Word is improper, and the thing impossible on this mad Supposition.

Without a God, a Providence, & a future State, there could be no such thing as Prosperity ; no Satisfaction, no real Enjoyment for rational Beings : nor even any true Peace and Tranquillity of Mind. No Affluence, no Variety of worldly Goods would be capable of yielding any Content to a thinking Man. He might entertain himself as he could with secular Amusements ; or stupify himself with sensual Pleasures ;

But what might become of his nobler & better Part? What Provision would there be for the Man? Should he engage himself in the Contemplation of Truth? to what Purpose, if he had nothing to expect beyond this Life. That one Truth, if it was a Truth, would spoil all the rest, and turn them into mere Dreams and Shadows. Should he then apply his Heart to know Wisdom, & practise Virtue? With what View? Should he endeavour to improve himself, to purify his Mind, and perfect his Nature, merely to prepare for the Grave, and fit himself for a State of Oblivion? Would any Man freight a Ship richly, in Order to provide for a certain Shipwreck at the End of his Voyage?

If it be allowed, that to aim at Virtue in such Circumstances would not be entirely lost Labour, on Account of its intrinsic Worth and Usefulness; it is readily granted. But alas! how faintly must it operate under such desperate Difficulties and Discouragements? And indeed, excluding the Comforts of Religion, & the Hopes of Futurity, no Sort of Good could be rightly relished. Virtue itself would only be considered and chosen as an Opiate, to lull the Minds of Men, and soften their Afflictions. And whatever Means were used, Man's Life would be perpetually overcast, and his Days pass on

is one continued Gloom. The more he possessed of worldly Goods, & the higher he rose in his Condition and Circumstances, the more obnoxious he would be to the Fears of Death, and the Horrors of utter Extinction. Whatever Advantages and Successes he met with, would only be the Mockeries of Fortune; like Prizes befalling a Man who lies under the Sentence of a speedy Execution. — And,

Since Atheism corrupts and poisons Prosperity, what fatal Effects must it produce in Adversity? Would it not immediately turn Distress into Despair, & Misery into Madness? An unhappy Mortal, deep sunk in Troubles and Misfortunes, and struggling with innumerable Hardships here upon Earth, and yet destitute at the same Time of a Protector and Patron in Heaven, is a Condition not even to imagined without Horror.

Let a Man be surrounded with Crosses and Calamities; let him be attacked at once by Want, Pain, Sicknels, Sorrow, and all the Varieties of Wretchedness; while he is convinced that God governs the World with perfect Wisdom and Goodness, he never need to want solid Consolation. Whatever he may endure for the present, he has, or may have, that Fund of Hope in his Mind, that Relief in his Eye, which are abundantly capable of supporting him. — But,

Supposing

Supposing him void of this Hope, & that Relief; what would he then be; and which Way would he turn himself? If any One preached to him the Fool's Doctrine, that "there is no God," would he be able to draw any Comfort out of it?

If we suppose him prevailed on to drink of the Cup of Atheism; how would it go down, or settle with him? Would it enable him to bear up under the Load that lay upon him? Alas! instead of alleviating his Sorrows, it would be an infinite Addition to them: Instead of yielding him Patience and Comfort in his Distress, it would be apt to confound all the Powers of his Soul, & drive him to Distraction. Doubtless every Man in Misery, if his Sufferings have not deprived him of his Senses, must think of Atheism with the utmost Regret, Detestation, and Abhorrence; as it robs him of his only Refuge, and leaves him destitute of all possible Comfort. He will be so far from "saying in his Heart," or endeavouring to persuade himself "there is no God," that he will naturally cry out with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? Thou, Lord, art my Rock, and my Fortress; my strong Salvation, whereunto I may continually resort." When his Soul fainteth within him, he will trust in the Name of the Lord, and say upon his God.

Serm. CVII.

Upon

Upon the Whole, The Scheme of the Atheist is certainly the blackest, most impious, and execrable that ever entered into the Heart of Man. It may be looked upon as the Sum & Substance of all possible Curses; as comprehending universal Ruin. A Man had better, infinitely better with the Sun out of the Firmament, & all the Lights of Heaven extinguished forever. For these are all inconsiderable in Comparison of the great Fountain of Light and Glory, who framed and fixed them in the Heavens for the Use of his Creatures, & who is ever able to enlighten us with them, or without them.

But further, Infidelity is not only uncomfortable to us, and prejudicial; but sinful also.

Whosoever hath sufficient Proofs afforded him for Conviction, (and such, under the Gospel, we all have,) is under an Obligation to yield his Assent: and whoever doth not, sins, not only against natural Light, but even against the greatest Mercies and Blessings that were ever vouchsafed to the World: and is therefore the greatest Sin, that, in these Days, Man is capable of committing. (*)

Those who have the Gospel propounded to them, and yet continue in Unbelief, their Case is the most dangerous of any in the World; whether they be SPECULATIVE OR PRACTICAL Infidels.

(*) See Vol. v. Page 220, 2

As to the former, we may guess how great their
 Condemnation will be, from the Greatness of their
 Sin in neglecting the Encouragements they have
 received. The Scripture every where gives it a bad
 Character, calling it an evil Heart or Unbelief to
 depart from the living God.

St. John speaks of Infidelity as the highest Affront
 to God imaginable, and, as it were, giving Him the
 Lie! "He that believeth not the Record which God
 hath given of his Son, hath made God a Liar;"
 and we cannot but reasonably suppose that God will
 severely punish those who put no Confidence in him
 (1). - There is no Sin, against which, severer Judge-
 ments are denounced in Scripture, than against Un-
 belief. Among those who are to have their Part in
 the Lake that burneth with Fire and Brimstone, the
 Unbelieving are placed in the first Rank, The
 "Fearful and Unbelieving, & the Abominable, and
 Murderers, &c." And When our Saviour expresses
 his highest Indignation against that evil Servant,
 who began to beat his Fellow-Servants, and to eat
 and drink, and be drunken; as if he had nothing
 more severe to terrify him with, he threatens to
 "cut him in sunder, and appoint him his Portion
 with

(1) A standing "Pillar of Salt" is a Monument of an unbelieving

Soul.

with Unbelievers," as with the worst of Offenders.

And, - It is but just and reasonable, that they who resist the clearest Light should have "their Portion in utter Darkness."

If there be a God, as holy, and just, and powerful, (as is supposed, and hath been proved,) What "Indignation and Wrath, what Tribulation and Anguish" must such Rebels expect, who have made God their Scorn and Ridicule, and done all in their Power to banish him out of the World, who is the great Creator and Governour of it? - To undermine his Being, and eradicate all Notions of him out of their own, and other's Minds; - To provoke his Creatures and Vassals to a Contempt of him, and to a slighting of his Fear and Worship? - Certainly, as this is the highest Provocation that any Man can be guilty of, so will it be punished with the severest Vengeance.

As for PRACTICAL Infidels, those who "hold the Truth in Unrighteousness," who in Words acknowledge the Gospel, but in Works deny it, their Condition is altogether as bad as the Others; indeed, (I had almost said,) it will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for the Former, than for them.

He who denies the Truth of the Christian Religion, and lives contrary to the Precepts of it, acts suitably

suitably to his Principles ; but he that owns the Truth of the Gospel, and at the same Time lives wickedly, offers Violence to those Principles which he hath entertained. (1.) — For,

If we profess ourselves Christians, by that Profession we declare to the World that we believe the Doctrines of Christianity ; but if, in the midst of this Profession, we live contrary to the Precepts of the holy Gospel, “ in Ungodliness, & worldly Lusts,” in the Neglect of God, and the Duties of Religion ; this very Profession we have made of the Gospel, will be an Aggravation of our Condemnation.

If we believe it, just as we believe the Histories of ancient Times, or the Descriptions of distant Countries, if we think it concerns us no more than the Ages that we can never recall, or the Nations that we shall never behold ; it would have been better for us, if we had never heard of the Name of God, or were really Atheists in Opinion, as well as Practice. — For,

“ It will serve only to aggravate our Guile, and sharpen

(1.) If we would know what a Man believes, we must attend rather to what he does, than to what he says. He that leads a wicked Life makes a more credible and effectual Profession of Infidelity, than He who in Words only denies the Gospel. — *Frustra, non Foliis, Arborum esimo. Non qui loquitur, sed qui facit, iste beatus erit.*

sharpen our Punishment. It is as necessary to "confess with our Mouth," as to "believe in our Hearts" that there is a God. But this necessary Profession of our Religion will certainly condemn us, unless it is confirmed and enlivened by our Practice. For it adds Hypocrisy to Sin; and the more we boast of our Faith, so much the louder our Sins will cry against us.

The speculative Atheist, (if there is any such Person,) hopes that there is no God, because he has affronted him. But the sinful Believer continues to affront him, though he knows that there is One. The former will not acknowledge him to be his Lord; but the latter calls him Lord, and at the same Time disobeys him. The former acts without Principles: the latter acts against them. And whilst One denies God's Being, the other tramples upon his Perfections. — He declares that God is infinite in Knowledge, in Goodness, in Justice and Power; but yet he daily commits Abomination in the Sight of him, who "discerns the Secrets of the Heart," and observes the Rise, the Progress, and Consummation of Sin. — He "lives, moves, and has his Being" thro the Goodness of God; and, (if you believe his Professions,) he is sensible of it; but yet he delights to grieve his Spirit, abuses the endearing

Instances

Instances of his loving-kindness, and witness his
Patience and Forbearance. — He boasts of his be-
ing the Servant of a just and righteous God; but
yet he transgresses the eternal Rules of his Justice,
and passes on from one Degree of Iniquity to ano-
ther. — He knows that there is a great and terrible
God, whose Power is able to destroy him forever
and ever, and whose Vengeance he can neither es-
cape, nor resist; and yet trifles with the Almighty,
and “treasures up to himself Wrath against the Day
of Wrath.”

How vain, then, and foolish is the Man that ima-
gines that the God of Wisdom will accept of his
fruitless Professions! (1) His Faith is so far from en-
terning

(1) The barren Belief of a God, it not properly a Virtue, because
we are almost compelled to believe, there is a God. To assent to a well-
attested Truth, is not a Matter of Choice, but rather a necessary Ope-
ration of the Mind: For Truth is its Natural Object; and when it
grasches itself, supported by authentic Testimony, the Mind as readily
receives it, as the Eye does the Light, when it springs forth from its
Fountain.

St. James has fully illustrated the Case, in the Instance of Charity.
They who make this most precious Pretending to that glorious Virtue,
yet unless we bring forth Fruits worthy of it, it is less than nothing, &
Vanity. (Jam. ii. 14. - 17.) It is not Charity, but an insolent Sarcastm,
that “bites the Soul” of the Needy, “and breaks them in Pieces with
Words.” — How fatally was the Church of Laodicea deceived, when
“she said she was rich, and increased with Goods, and had need of
nothing,” tho’, at the same Time, she was “wretched and miserable,
and poor, and blind, and naked!” (Revel. EVII.) Thus

attenuating his Guilt, that it renders it inexcusable.

“The Devils themselves believe,” in this Manner, and if his Belief has no better Effect, he will also hereafter “tremble” with them.

Do we think, that at the great Day of Judgment we shall escape by pleading This for ourselves, that we believed the Gospel, and made Profession of it? no; “out of own Mouths we shall be condemned;” our very Excuse will but aggrivate our Offence.

Indeed, Supposing that we do not disbelieve a God at all, nor live wickedly, from which, through prudential Motives we may abstain, (as Virtue is, in all things, its own Reward,) yet if we neglect the Honour and Service confessedly due to the divine Majesty; neither glorifying him as God, nor walking before him with that filial Awe, & pious Reverence, which are plainly the bounden Duty of all Men, & doubtless of Christians; if we confess a heavenly Father, & believe in his Son, & yet do not love him, & do not keep his Commandments, we should set him before our Eyes so constantly, as to live always habitually in his Fear. We may, indeed, forget God; if we will; but still we shall be remembered by Him; from whom we may depart, but cannot escape. In our Choice it is, whether we

will. Thus are They deceived, who satisfy themselves with believing, that there is an infinitely wise, and just, and holy God, while they offend his Wisdom, his Justice, and Holiness.

will be the BETTER or WORSE for Him. But ONE we must : and that beyond Expression. " For , God will bring every Work into Judgment , with every secret thing , whether it be good or whether it be evil ; and will render to every Man according to his Works. " — In a Word,

Infidelity detrays and rakes us off from every Privilege and Blessing of the Gospel , and from all Hope of eternal Salvation. " He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved : But he that believeth not shall be damned. "

I shall only add to what hath been already said, that, seeing these things, we " take especial heed to ourselves that there be in none of us an evil Heart of Unbelief to depart from the living God ; " and in that Consideration, to think it not only our bounden Duty, but also our highest Interest, to labour after a true Faith : (1) — And, having obtained it, if we would not aggravate our own Condemnation, to be especially careful to live according to its Precepts.

(1) " Stablish, strengthen, settle yourselves ; " *scilicet, dum in Dutibus Animar, paulo Memento hanc volubilem impellitur. Qui dubitat, negant.*

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Do we think, that at the great Day of Judgment we shall escape by pleading This for ourselves, that we believed the Gospel, and made Profession of it? no; "out of own Mouths we shall be condemned;" our very Excuse will but aggrivate our Offence; then, a supreme Lord of all Power and Perfection, and at the same Time pretend it needless to worship him, this is not, to any good Purpose, believing in him at all: &c. (under)

in him at all: - And, if we think on him BUT SELDOM, it is believing in him but LITTLE. He, on whom we depend continually, to whom we owe Duty continually, and in whose Presence we continually are, ought never to be far from our Thoughts: but we should set him before our Eyes so constantly, as to live always habitually in his Fear. We may, indeed, forget God; if we will; but still we shall be remembered by Him; from whom we may depart, but cannot escape. In our Choice it is, whether we

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(1) "Stahlish, strengthen, settle yourselves ;" *sta, dum in Dubio*
of Animæ, paulo Momento hæc vel illa impellitur. Qui dubitat, neganti
of præsumit.

22

will be the better or worse for Him But one wo
must : and the of Expiration For, God
will bring every ~~W~~ Judgment, with every
factor in it, whether it be good, whether it be
evil : and will render to every Man according to
his Works. — In a Word,

SERMON CVIII.

On the same Subject.

Heb. iii. 12. "Take heed, Brethren, lest there
be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief."

Notwithstanding all the Clearness of Evidence,
whereby the Being of God is proved, & the conse-
quent Duties of Religion upon it, manifesting the
Folly of Infidelity; - notwithstanding the Uncom-
fortableness of Atheism, and the Sinfulness of it,
Many there are, who are now conscious and willing
to acknowledge, that they act contrary to all the
reasonable Evidence and Convictions of Religion;
are nevertheless very apt to imagine within them-
selves, that if the great Truths of Religion were
proved to them by some stronger Evidence, they
should by that Means be worked upon to act o-
therwise than they do: They are willing fondly to
imagine, that if they had lived in our Saviour's
Time; if they had heard his Preaching, and seen
his Miracles; if they had had the Advantage of be-
holding those mighty Works which He performed
for

for the Proof of his Divine Commission, as the Jews then had: they should not, like Them, have "rejected the Counsel of God against themselves," but with all Cheerfulness have believed his Doctrine, and embraced his Religion. They fancy, they should immediately have become Disciples of Christ; and that the Truths which He taught, would have had a most powerful Influence upon the whole Course of their Lives: they should have resigned all their Doubts, believed without a Scruple, and obeyed without Reluctance.

"If the Christian Religion (say they,) be true & from God, & the Belief & Practice of it be so necessary to Salvation, Why doth not God, (who, as the Gospel affirms, willeth all Men to be saved,) interpose by a continued Series of Miracles to remove the Courses of Infidelity and Corruption among Christians? On the other Hand, we see nothing now a Days come to pass, but according to the established Laws and Order of Nature; The present Age produces none of those wonderfull and supernatural Events which are reported to have been done by Jesus Christ and the first Founders of Christianity. In a Word, we discover nothing of that miraculous Power upon which the Truth of Christianity is supposed to be founded, and which could not but give

give greater Force and Efficacy, (were it still continued,) to the Laws of it; and therefore the Continuance of such a Power appears highly necessary to us, (say they,) both in Order to the Conviction of Unbelievers, and the Conversion of Sinners."

This being an Objection which at once may be thought to affect the Credit of our holy Religion, and the Wisdom and Goodness of God, as though He had not afforded Men proper & sufficient Means for the Belief and Practice of it, I shall endeavour to remove, by showing,

First, That Miracles are not Now necessary to the Conviction of Unbelievers; Or,

Secondly, To the Conversion of Sinners.

As to the first Particular, It is sufficient, that we are assured that there was a Time when the Christian Religion was confirmed by numerous and undoubted Miracles; and that Jesus Christ & his Followers could not have done those things which they did, "if God had not been with them." — Now,

We have all the Evidence that can be desired of the Truth of those Facts, & more especially of such of them as were miraculous, that are recorded in Scripture: for the Gospels & the Acts of the Apostles

its Plea to Want of Evidence, examined. 55

they were published at a Time when these Miracles they relate, were fresh in the Memories of Men; at a Time, too, when it mightily concerned the great Estates of Christianity, the Jews in particular, to disprove them; & when, if they had not been true, they certainly would; (as most easily they might,) have done so. But this, (knowing it to be impossible,) they did at no Time attempt. (1)

The Miracles, then, which were done by Jesus Christ, were a convincing Proof of the Authority of His Doctrine: And we, having all the Evidence that Matters of Fact, done at a Distance, are capable of; what Necessity is there that God, in Order to convince Infidels, should, on every Occasion, interpose by a miraculous Power? Seeing, if Men will make use of their Reason and Understanding, they may be satisfied of the Truth of the things already recorded in holy Writ; but if they will not, neither would Men be convinced by any new Ones, but still see them, as the Jews did, in the Time of our Saviour, with a Veil over their Eyes: for, it is plain from the Case of that obdurate People, that, whatever Force Miracles may have in them to persuade; yet they do not irresistibly compel the Assent

(1) See their Confession in this Case, Acts iv. 16.

of Men to the Truths they are designed to establish.

It is reasonable, therefore, to believe, that those Prejudices which hindered the Jews, and still hinder Unbelievers from examining the Proofs and assenting to the Truth of the Christian Revelation, would not be removed tho a Miracle were wrought before their Eyes to confirm it. — If the true Reason why these Men act thus foolishly, is not because the Doctrines of Religion are not sufficiently evidenced, but because They themselves are, without allowing themselves time for Consideration, hurried away by some unruly Passions to act directly contrary to all Reason & Evidence; it is plain, (unless God should irresistibly compel them,) they might still continue to act as they do, tho' the Evidence of these things were really greater than it is. If their Hearts & Affections were not set upon THIS World, more than upon the NEXT; if they valued not the present sinful Enjoyments of Sense, above the "Expectation of the Glory that shall be revealed," most certainly they would believe, repent, and be saved. But if their Hearts be set upon earthly things, and their Passions be stronger than all the Arguments of Reason; If they do, indeed, so love the Pleasures of Sin, as that they cannot persuade themselves by all the Motives of Religion to live like Christians, we need

not

not doubt to affirm, that they might still have been in the same Case, tho' Miracles were still common among them. — But to resume our Argument. — Those who contend for the Continuance of Miracles, in Order to evince more effectually the Truth of revealed Religion, proceed upon One of these Suppositions: Either that it is necessary every particular Person should for his own Satisfaction, be One Time or Other of his Life, an Eye-witness of some MIRACULOUS FACT; Or else, that once we learn, in every Age & Nation, God should exert his Omnipotence, and the Miracle be committed to some publick and standing Record, for the Information of those who were not Eye-witnesses of it.

As to what is here required in the last Place, it is obviated by saying, that we have all the Evidence of the Miracles recorded in the Gospel, that any Man, who is not an Eye-witness of it can have of a Miracle done in his own Age, if he will but examine the Proofs of them; but if he will not, his Negligence cannot be pleaded in Excuse for his Incredulity. — Besides,

It is below the Majesty and Wisdom of God, when he has afforded Men the ordinary and sufficient Means of Conviction, to alter the established Laws of Nature, in Order to gratify a vain, and idle,

and after all, perhaps, a fruitless Curiosity, on
 Upon the former Supposition, Miracles would
 be so frequent, that they would become of little
 Force or Consideration; serving only to put Men
 upon forming nice Schemes to explain the Appear-
 ances of them. Most Men would, (after some Time
 of their being rendered so familiar) look upon them,
 not as the extraordinary and immediate Effects of
 God's Power, but of some natural and necessary, tho
 unknown Cause; of which they might form
 some plausible Conjecture. This however is certain,
 that the Effects, which Miracles have upon Men,
 depend upon a good, docile, and obedient Temper
 of Mind. He that is in this Disposition, needs no
 further Evidence from Miracles for his Conviction;
 but he that is not, would not, it is likely, be con-
 vinced by them, tho we should suppose them more
 frequent. But, whether he would or no, there is no
 Reason to expect that God should alter the Uni-
 formity of his Conduct, & have Recourse to EXTRA-
 ORDINARY Methods, where the ORDINARY are suf-
 ficient. (1) Here also it may deserve to be further

con-
 (1) Miracles were highly necessary to the Introduction of the Chris-
 tian Religion into the World, & to be a sensible Evidence to all Man-
 kind of its divine Authority; but Now that the Gospel is generally
 entertained, there is not the same Reason, why this miraculous Power
 should

considered: that besides the Evidence of Miracles, whereby both our Lord and his Apostles confirmed the Truth of their Doctrine, they attested it with their Blood; "When, for the Sake of the Truth, were tortured, and suffered Death, not accepting Deliverance," thereby giving to the World, all the Satisfaction that could be desired, of the Truth of what they taught, that they did not act upon any worldly Motives whatever; but out of a full Conviction of the divine Authority of our holy Religion, and the Truth of those Facts, upon which the Proofs of it were founded; and when, throughout the whole Course of their Lives, were so far from designing any Imposture, that they discovered the greatest Plainness and Simplicity of Manners, and in the Discharge of their Ministry appeared all

along should still be continued. When the End is once obtained, the Means cease; and the wise God, who is never wanting in what is necessary, is still never lavish in that which is superfluous.

Now that the Christian Religion hath got firm Footing in the World, and the Prejudices of Education, in a contrary Religion, are removed; and the Powers of the World are reconciled to Christianity, there is no Need of such extraordinary Means for its Continuance, as there was for its first Introduction into the World. God now leaves it to be carried on in such Ways as are more level and agreeable to the Nature of Man, by its own rational Force, with his secret Influence, without forcibly obliging Men to become Profelytes to the Doctrine of his Son. See Sermon XCVI. The Wisdom of God, in the established Proof of a future State, by Revelation, &c. (Serm. CVIII.)

along "to have spoke forth the Words of Soberness and Truth." Here therefore, it must be granted, we have a considerable Addition to the Evidence already given, to ascertain us of the Truth of our Holy Religion. (1)

Whatever Difficulties therefore Men may raise, (and what is there which ingenuous Men cannot find Difficulties in,) concerning the Nature and Properties of true Miracles; yet when those very Persons, who were empowered to work such Miracles, suffer Death in Confirmation of the Doctrine they were designed to establish; This must be admitted as an additional Argument at least both of the Truth of such Miracles, and the Veracity of the Persons by whom they were said to be done.

Miracles, then, if they were Now to be performed, would work nothing FURTHER for the Conviction of Unbelievers than those already wrought; for, if they believe not these, neither would they be persuaded by others, were they to be vouchsafed unto them.

As Miracles, then, are not necessary for the Conviction of Unbelievers, so neither are they,

Secondly, For the Conversion of Sinners: And we

(1) See the Note, page 29, &c.

~~we have the Reasons why we may assert it, in the fol-~~
~~lowing Propositions.~~

First, That the same Motives, which now induce Men to put off their Repentance, would, in all Probability, be as prevalent, tho' we should suppose Miracles more frequent.

Secondly, Tho' it should be granted that a Miracle might, for the present, make some powerful Impression on the Mind of a Sinner, who resists the ordinary Means of Grace; yet there is no Reason to expect that such an Impression would be of any long, or lasting Continuance.

Thirdly, Tho' what is here asserted could not be made appear from probable Reasons & Arguments; yet it is confirmed by Experience and undeniable Matters of Fact. — And,

First, The same Motives which now induce Men to put off their Repentance, would, in all probability, be as prevalent, tho' we should suppose Miracles more frequent.

The Impenitence of Sinners does not ordinarily proceed from their Ignorance of the Nature or Necessity of Repentance; but from the prevailing Force of some present Temptation or evil Habit, and the

Designs of repenting hereafter; but, Neither of these Obstacles to the Conversion of a Sinner would be removed by the Method under Consideration.

For, We ought, all of us, to be sensible, that the Power of resisting Temptation, and mortifying our criminal Passions, is Not to be ascribed to any natural Strength or Capacity in ourselves, but is owing, (tho' in Concurrence, indeed, with our own Endeavours,) to a Principle of divine Grace; - to a holy Frame and Disposition of Mind, ingenerated in us by the Spirit of God: whose heavenly Assistances those Persons who resist the ordinary Means of Grace have the least Title to, tho' a greater Measure and Degree of them are required in Order to their Conversion. — Indeed, If a Miracle had a Power of conferring INWARD Grace upon those who might be Eye-witnesses of it, this would very much alter the Case: But, as divine Grace is the incommunicable Gift of God alone, and the longer Sinners continue in an impenitent State, they render themselves at once more unworthy of it, and less disposed to comply with it, their Conversion must needs be attended with Difficulties answerable to these Defects.

Tho' a Sinner, therefore, upon seeing a Miracle done before his Eyes; should thereupon, (which indeed, it is very likely he would,) be awakened into a

more

more awful Sense of God and Religion, and enter into a speedy Resolution of reforming his evil Manners; yet, when he comes to the Trial, & sets himself to root out those Vices which have been planted in him by long Custom and Continuance, it will go as near with him to part with them, as the plucking out of a Right Eye; or the cutting off of a Right Hand. He would therefore, in all Probability, take the same Methods to free himself from these Difficulties, as other People ordinarily do, who are equally convinced of the Necessity of Repentance, (i.e.) to put it off to an After-Day. — For,

It is not for Want of Conviction of the Guilt and Danger of Sin, that Men continue in a sinful Impenitent State, but from a vain Presumption upon a more convenient Season, and better Disposition for the Work of Repentance hereafter.

Would a Miracle tend to convince a Sinner of the divine Authority of the Laws of the Gospel? That we here suppose him convinced of already. Would it tend to enforce his Obedience to those Laws, by conveying any spiritual or sanctifying Graces into his Nature? That, we have shewn, it has no Manner of natural Efficacy to do. What would it then do in Order to his Conversion? It may be said, that it might be an Occasion of bringing him to a

better Temper of Consideration; and make him take up some speedy Resolutions of Amendment. It is granted; but then, such a Resolution is no more than what we see Sinners taking up daily, and yet notwithstanding this, how ordinary is it for them to shift off their Repentance from Time to Time, till it be past Time? — How many Thousands, and thousands of thousands, have gone out of the World with the Guilt of Impenitence, and the Designs of Repentance at once and together?

To assume here, the grand Object, both to speculative and practical Infidels; “The Resurrection of One from the Dead,” as, of all other Miracles, the most apt to convince and convert Men.

It is urged, (& it seems to be all that can be urged in the Case,) that tho’ Men firmly believe the Scriptures and are very sensible of the Folly and Danger of delaying their Conversion; yet to converse with One sent directly from that unknown State, and a dreadful Spectacle of the Horror and Dispair that reign among the miserable and wretched, could not but, for some Time at least, give a Sinner more awful Apprehensions of Religion, and the “Terrors of the Lord.” — Examples we know are far more prevalent than the most lively and moving Discriptions; and tho’ we firmly believe the Truth

of any thing: yet, when it comes before us, and we see it exemplified or confirmed by a plain and obvious Instance, it brings the Matter nearer to our Thoughts, and at the same Time more powerfully awakens our Attention, and moves our Affections.

Thus Men may argue with Respect to all other Miracles, that they may be OCCASIONAL Motives, at least, to the Conversion of a Sinner, by putting him upon making proper and useful Reflexions upon them. — They may be so: and we so far admit the Propriety of the Objection, as to grant that it is very probable that the Sight of a miraculous Event might, for the present, make a very strong and awakening Impression on the Mind of a Sinner upon whom the ordinary Means of Grace have no sensible Effects. But then, it will appear,

2dly, That it is not reasonably to be expected, that such an Impression should be of any long or lasting Continuance.

To convince us of This, let us consider a little, what is commonly the Issue of these pious Resolutions which Men are forward to make in OTHER Cases, when startled by any extraordinary Accident of Providence.

How usual is it for the most profligate Sinners,

Serm. CVIII.

when

when the Hand of God is upon them, and presseth them sore in any grievous Affliction; especially such as their Sins have visibly brought upon them? How usual is it for them to be touched to the quick with a Sense of their Guilt; and, upon such Occasions, (with Ahab,) to give many external Signs of Humiliation: but as soon as the Terroure is over, and the Danger of Death past, return to their old Habits of Sin and Folly: So it is more than probable, it would be in the present Case. Should God send a Messenger from the Dead, to assure Men of the Certainty of a future State, and the Danger of their present Wickedness; as soon as the Fright was over and their present terrible Apprehensions ceased, it is by no Means impossible or improbable that their old vicious Habits and beloved Sins, should again by Degrees prevail over them. — But,

3dly. Tho' what is here asserted, could not be made appear from probable Reasons & Arguments, yet it is confirmed by Experience and undeniable Matters of Fact. We have numerous Examples in Scripture, & it may not be improper to instance in some few of them, to this Purpose. — As,

1st. Who would have thought that Pharaoh, after all the Miracles which were done before his Eyes, and

and which he did not only see, but feel the dreadful Effects of, should still have persisted in his Disobedience to the Commands of God. — So again,

2dly, Notwithstanding the many Miracles, which Moses wrought afterwards, in the Deliverance and Preservation of the Jews, what little Effect had they towards reclaiming them from the Error, or Evil of their Ways; How apt were they to forget God their Saviour, who had done so great things for them? And, tho' (after Moses,) God raised up a Succession of other Prophets; yet, how are the Prophetical Writings every where filled with grievous Complaints of their Sins and Impieties. — So again,

3dly, During our Saviour's Ministry here upon Earth, tho' it had not been heard from the Beginning of the World, that any Man had done those Miracles he did, either for Number or Quality; yet "Many, even of his Disciples, forsook him, and walked no more with him." And afterwards, when the Apostles entered upon the Government of the Church, tho' Miracles were very ordinary and frequent, yet for "the Sake of this present evil World, the Love of many waxed cold." — Nothing, indeed, can be more plain from all the Apostolical Writings, than that there were Corruptions among
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Christians even in the Infancy of the Church; and that several, "who in their Words confessed him, yet in their Works, denied the Lord who bought them."

What I would now infer from, - and what I hope sufficiently appears from all that has been said, is, that the Reason both of the Incredulity of Unbelievers, and the Corruption of Christians, lies in the Perverseness of their Wills, and in the Force of their sinful Inclinations and evil Habits; and that while Men are under the Power and Influence of these Prejudices, which the Grace of God, with their own Endeavours, can only remove, all the Miracles recorded in Scripture, (should God condescend to repeat them,) would be ineffectual either to their Conviction, or their Conversion.

God has given us all the Proofs of the Truth of our Religion, that the Nature of the Thing would bear, or that were reasonable either for God to give, or Men to expect. And unless God should work upon Men by such Methods, as are wholly inconsistent with the Design of Religion and the Nature of Virtue and Vice; which we are sure he will never do; nothing could have been done more, than has already been done, to convince Men of the Truth of Religion, and to persuade them to embrace their

own Happiness. And indeed no reasonable Man can fail of being persuaded by the Evidence we now have. For if, in other Cases, we assent to those Things as certain and demonstrated, which, if our Faculties of judging & reasoning do not necessarily deceive us, do upon the most impartial View appear clearly and plainly to be true; there is the same Reason why in Moral and Religious Matters we ~~we~~ should look upon those things likewise to be certain and demonstrated, which, upon the exactest and most deliberate Judgment we are capable of making, do appear to us to be as clearly and certainly true, as it is certain that our Faculties do not necessarily and unavoidably deceive us, in all our Judgments concerning the Nature of God, concerning the proper Happiness of Man, and concerning the Difference of Good and Evil. And if, in other Cases, we always act without the least Hesitation, upon the Credit of good and sufficient Testimony; and look upon that Man as foolish and ridiculous; who sustains great Losses, or lets slip great Opportunities & Advantages in Business, only by distrusting the most credible and well-attested Things in the World; it is plain there is the same Reason, why we should do so also in Matters of Religion.

So that unless our Actions be determined by
Serm. CVIII. some

some other Thing, than by Reason and right Judgment; the Evidence which we have of the great Truths of Religion, ought to have the same Effect upon our Lives and Actions, as if they were proved to us by any other Sort of Evidence that could be desired. — It is true;

The Resurrection of Christ, and his other mighty Works, must, after all, be confessed not to be such ocular Demonstrations of the Truth of his Divine Commission to After-Generations, as they were to those Men who then lived and saw him and conversed with him. But since the Matters of Fact are as clearly proved to Us, as it is possible for any Matter of Fact at that Distance of Time to be; since the Evidence of This, is as great and greater, than of most of those Things, on which Men venture the whole of their secular Affairs, and on which they are willing to spend all their Time and Pains: Since the Case is thus; He that will rather venture all that he can possibly enjoy, or suffer; he that will run the Hazard of losing Eternal Happiness, and falling into Eternal Misery, rather than believe the most credible and rational Thing in the World, merely because he does not see it with his Eyes; it is plain that That Man does not disbelieve the thing because he thinks the Evidence of it not sufficiently

siently Wrong, but because it opposes some parti-
 cular Vice of his, which makes it his Interest that it
 should not be true; and, for that Reason, he might
 also have disbelieved it, tho' he had seen it himself.
 Men may invent what vain Pretences they please,
 to excuse their Infidelity and their Wickedness:
 But certainly That Man, who can despise the Au-
 thority both of Reason and Scripture in Conjun-
 tion; who can elude the plainest Evidence of Mat-
 ter of Fact; who can be deaf to all the Promises
 and kind Admonitions of the Gospel; and to all the
 Threatnings and terrible Denunciations of the
 Wrath of God, made known in great Measure by
 the Light of Nature, and confirmed by the Addi-
 tion of express Revelation; Certainly That Man
 must have some other Reason for his Unbelief,
 than the pretended Want of sufficient Evidence.
 Did Men follow the unprejudiced Judgment of
 their own Minds, and the impartial Dictates of na-
 tural Reason; the least Possibility of obtaining eter-
 nal Happiness, or the least Suspicion of falling into
 endless Misery, would immediately determine them
 to make it the great Study and Business of their
 Lives, to obtain the One, and to avoid the Other.
 If, then, we see Men act directly contrary to this
 natural Principle, and almost wholly neglect these
 Things,

Things, not only when there is a fair Appearance and Probability of their being true, which the Light of Nature itself affords; but also when there is all reasonable Evidence given of their being certainly true, by express Revelation in the Gospel; Is it not very plain, that such Men are governed, not by Reason and the Force of Evidence, but by some other very different Cause of their Actions?

What THAT Cause is, is very apparent from the Lives and Actions of most of those Persons, who pretend Want of Evidence to be the Ground of their Infidelity. Their Lusts, their Appetites, and Affections are interested: They are Lovers of Vice, and Slaves to evil Habits: And therefore they are not willing to discern the Evidence, which would compel them to believe That, which yet they cannot believe with any Comfort, so long as they resolve not to part with their beloved Sins. Their Hearts and Affections are habitually fixt upon Things here below; & therefore they will not attend to the Force of any Argument, that would raise their Affections to Things above. They are enslaved to the sensual Pleasures & sinful Enjoyments of Earth; and therefore they will not hearken to any reasonable Conviction, which would persuade them to relinquish these present Gratifications, for the future and more

Spiritual

Spiritual Joys of Heaven. "The Love of this present World has blinded their Eyes, that they cannot see" and therefore "they receive not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are Foolishness unto them, neither can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned." — In a Word, The true and only Reason, (as we have seen,) why "Men love Darkness rather than Light, is, because their Deeds are evil." — Men, who are resolved not to reform their Lives, care not to discern the Evidence of those Truths which must make them uneasy in their Sins. — In this Case, were the Proofs of the Truth of our Religion much stronger than they are, or than they can be imagined or desired to be; yet these Men would be in the very same Case, & perpetually want stronger and stronger Evidence in the Matter.

It is not, therefore, for Want of this, that Men disbelieve the great Truths of Religion; but plainly for Want of Integrity, and of dealing ingeniously & impartially with themselves; that they suffer not the Arguments of Religion to have that Weight & Influence upon them, which in the Judgment of right Reason, they ought manifestly to have. So long as Men permit their Passions and Appetites to overrule their Reason, it is impossible they should have due Apprehensions in Matters of Religion, or make

any right & true Judgment concerning these things. Men that are strongly biassed and prejudiced even in **WORLDLY** Affairs, it is well known how hard and difficult it is for them to judge according to Reason and to suffer the Arguments & Evidences of Truth to have their due Weight with them. How much more in Matters of **RELIGION**, which concern things future and remote from Sense, must it needs be, that Men's present Interests and Passions, will pervert their Judgment, and blind their Understandings.

Wherefore Men that pretend to be Followers of right Reason, if they will judge truly of the Reasonableness and Credibility of the Christian Religion, it is absolutely necessary that, in the first Place, in Order to That End, they become impartially willing to embrace whatever shall upon the whole appear to be agreeable to Reason and Truth, and grounded upon good Evidence, without interesting their Vices in the Judgment; and that, before all things, they resolve to be guided in all their Actions, by whatever Rule shall at any Time be well proved to them to be the Will of God. And when they have put themselves into this Temper and Frame of Mind; then let them try if they can any longer reject the Evidence of the Gospel. "If any Man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether

that is be of God." For, "to them that are meek, God will guide in Judgment; & such as are gentle, shall he will teach his Way." — Indeed,

Men that are of this good Disposition, willing to be governed by Reason, and not prejudiced by Lusts and Vicious Appetites; could not but give their Assent to the Doctrines of Christianity, upon Account of the very intrinsic Excellency and Reasonableness of the Things themselves, even though the external Evidence of their Certainty had been much less than it at present is. Indeed were there scarcely any other Evidence than barely the Excellency and Reasonableness and natural Probability of the great Truths of Religion, together with the Consideration of the vast Importance of them; yet even in This Case it would be infinitely wisest and most agreeable to Reason, for Men to live according to the Rules of the Gospel. And though their Faith extended no further, than only to a Belief of the Possibility of the Truth of the Christian Revelation; yet even This alone ought in all Reason to have Weight enough to determine reasonable Creatures, to "live soberly, righteously & godly." For, "Is it not plainly most reasonable, (as an antient Writer expresses it,) if each of the opposite Opinions were equally doubtful and uncertain; yet by all

Means to embrace and entertain That which brings some Hope along with it, rather than that which brings none? For on one Side of the Question there is no Danger at all of incurring any Calamity, if that which we believe and expect, should at last prove false; But on the other side, there is the greatest Hazard in the World, the Loss of eternal Life, if the Opinion which Unbelievers rely upon, should at last prove an Error." And again: "What say ye, O ye ignorant Men, ye Men of miserable and most deplorable Folly? Can ye forbear fearing within yourselves, that at least those things may possibly prove true, which ye now despise and mock at? Have ye not at least some Misgivings of Mind, least possibly that when ye now perversely and obstinately refuse to believe, ye should at last be convinced of by sad Experience, when it will be too late to repent?" Nor is this the Judgment of CHRISTIAN Writers only, but also of the wisest and most considerate HEATHENS. "We ought to spare no Pains, (saith Plato,) to obtain the Habits of Virtue and Wisdom in this present Life; For the Prize is noble, and the Hope is very great." And Cicero: "They have gained a great Prize indeed, who have persuaded themselves to believe, that when Death comes, they shall perish utterly: What comfort is there,

these, What is there to be boasted of, in that Opinion?" And again: "If after Death, (saith he,) as some little and contemptible Philosophers think, I shall be nothing; yet there is no Danger, that when we are all dead, those Philosophers should laugh at me for my Error." — But,

This is not our Case. God has afforded Us, (as we have largely and particularly shown,) many and certain Proofs of the Truth of our Religion; even as certain, as any Matter of Fact is capable of having. And we now exhort Men to believe, not what is barely POSSIBLE, and EXCELLENT, and PROBABLE, and OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE in itself; but what moreover they have all the POSITIVE EVIDENCE, and all the REASON IN THE WORLD to oblige them to believe. — All that remains, therefore, (by Way of Inference,) is,

First, To exhort those who call themselves Deists, or Followers of Natural Religion only, without Regard to the Gospel, to consider seriously what it is they reject; and, when they have separated the undisputed Doctrines of Christ from the uncertain Opinions of contentious Men, Then to judge, whether despising this gracious Offer of the divine Goodness, be not "rejecting the Counsel of God against themselves," and foolishly forsaking their own Mercies. (Serm. CVIII.) Yet

Yet how can this be, you will perhaps say? Can God punish his Creatures for walking by THAT Light which he himself has set up in their own Minds, tho' He has at the same Time perhaps revealed a fuller Light from Heaven? Most certainly He can; for the very same Reason that a Prince might punish his Subjects for acting by the Light of Nature; instead of governing themselves by the civil Laws of the Land. — It is not a Matter of Indifference, whether you embrace Christianity or not. Tho Reason could answer all the Purposes of Revelation, (which is far, very far from being the Case,) yet you are not at Liberty to make it your sole Guide, if there be such a thing as a true Revelation. We are all the Subjects of the Almighty; & whether we will acknowledge it or not, we live, and cannot but live, under his Government. His Will is the Law of his Kingdom. If he has made no express Declaration of his Will, we must collect it as well as we can from what we know of his Nature and our own. But if he has expressly declared his Will, THAT is the Law we are to be governed by. We may, indeed, refuse to be governed by it: but it is at our Peril if we do; for if it proves a true Declaration of his Will, to reject it, is Rebellion. — But,

To reject or receive it, you may alledge, is not a thing

thing in your own Power. Belief depends not on your Will, but your Understanding. And will the righteous Judge of the Earth condemn you for Want of Understanding? No; but he may and will condemn you for the wrong Conduct of your Understanding. It is not indeed in your Power to believe whatever you please, whether credible or incredible; but it is in your Power to consider thoroughly, whether a supposed Incredibility be real or only apparent. It is in your Power to bestow a greater or less Degree of Attention on the Evidence before you. It is in your Power to examine it with an earnest Desire to find out the Truth, and a firm Resolution to embrace it wherever you do find it; or on the contrary, to bring with you a Heart full of incorrigible Depravity, or invincible Prepossessions.

Have you, then, truly and honestly done every thing that is confessedly in your Power, towards forming a right Judgment of Revelation? Have you ever laid before yourself, in one View, the whole collective Evidence of Christianity: the Consistence, Harmony, and Connection, of all its various Parts; the long Chain of Prophecies undeniably completed in it; the astonishing & well-attested Miracles that attended it; the perfect Sanctity of its Author; the Purity of its Precepts; the Sublimity of its Doc-

trines; the amazing Rapidity of its Progress; the illustrious Company of Confessors, Saints, and Martyrs, who died to confirm its Truth; together with an infinite Number of collateral Proofs and subordinate Circumstances, all concurring to form such a Body of Evidence, as no other Truth in the World can show; such as must necessarily beat-down, by its own Weight and Magnitude, all trivial Objections to particular Parts? Surely these things are not Trifles; surely they at least demand Seriousness and Attention.

Have you, then, done the Gospel this common Justice? Have you ever sat down to consider it with Impartiality and Candour; without any favourite Vice or early Prejudice, without any Fondness for Applause, or Novelty, or Refinement, to mislead you? Have you examined it with the same Care & Diligence that you would examine a Title to an Estate? Have you enquired for proper Books? Have you read the Defences of Revelation, as well as the Attacks upon it? Have you in difficult Points applied for the Opinion of wise and learned Friends; just as you would consult the ablest Lawier when your Property was concerned, or the most skilful Physicians when your Life was at Stake;

If you can truly say, that you have done all these things

things: if you have faithfully bestowed on these Enquiries, all the Leisure & Abilities you are Master of, and called in every Help within your Reach, there is little Danger of any material Doubts remaining upon your Mind. But if after all there should, be not afraid; trust in God, & be at Peace; "if your own Heart condemn you not, then may you have Confidence towards God." You are in the Hands of a gracious Master, who will not require more of you than you are able to perform. To the modest, the humble, the diligent, the virtuous Enquirer; who labours after Conviction, but cannot thoroughly arrive at it; who never attempts or wishes to insinuate his Scruples into others; who earnestly strives, who fervently prays, for more Light and Strength; crying out with all the passionate Sincerity of an honest Heart, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine Unbelief;" to him every equitable Allowance will undoubtedly be made, every Instance of compassionate Tendernefs be shown. "For like as a Father pitieth his own Children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him." But to them who neither fear nor regard him: to the bold unbelieving Libertine, who is against the Gospel, because the Gospel is against him; to the Man of Pride and Paradox, who burns to distinguish himself

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from

from the Vulgar by the Novelty of his Opinions, and would disdain to follow the common Herd of Mankind, (as he is pleased to term them,) even tho' he knew they were leading him to Heaven; to the subtle minute Philosopher, who refines away every Dictate of common Sense, and is lost in the dark Profound of his own wretched Sophistry; to the Buffoon, who laughs and takes pains to make all the World laugh at every thing serious and sacred; to the indolent, negligent, superficial Free-thinker, who reads but little, and takes for granted a great Deal, and understands nothing thoroughly; to the Man of Pleasure and Amusement, who treats all these things with a giddy, wanton, contemptuous, Levity; and thinks that the whole Fabric of Revelation may be overturned by a silly Cavil, or a profane Jest, thrown out in the gay Moments of convivial Mirth; to these, I say, and all like these, the Almighty will one Day most assuredly show, that his gracious Offers of Salvation are not to be despised, and trampled upon, and ridiculed with Impunity.

Consider, then, you, who reject the Gospel, (if any such there be,) consider, I entreat you, on what Grounds you reject it; and think a little seriously on these things once more in your Lives, before
you

you resolve never to think again. Look well into your own Hearts and see whether you are really, what perhaps you profess to be, Unbelievers on Conviction; or whether you have taken up your Infidelity, as some do their Faith, upon Trust. It becomes not Us to judge you uncharitably; but indeed it becomes you to examine yourselves very strictly. You may easily deceive the World; you may, if you please, deceive yourselves; but God you cannot deceive. He, to whom all Hearts are open as the Day, he knows whether you are conscientious and honest Doubters, or careless, prejudiced, profane Despisers, of his Word. "It is a small thing for you to be judged of Man's Judgment; he that judgeth you is the Lord," and by the unerring Rules of his Justice you must finally stand or fall. Think then whether you can face that Justice without Dismay; whether you can boldly plead before the Tribunal of Christ the Sincerity of your Unbelief as a Bar to your Condemnation. That Plea may possibly in some Cases be a good one. God grant it may in yours! But remember this one thing; that you stake your own Souls upon the Truth of it.

2dly, To exhort all those who profess themselves Christians, above all things to live "worthy of their

holy Profession ;" to " let their Light shine before Men, that others seeing their good Works, may glorify their Father which is in Heaven ;" at least, to " give no Offence to Them that are without," lest " thro' them the Name of God be blasphemed among the Gentiles, as it is written." — And,

Lastly, To exhort those who TEACH Christianity to others, that, since hindring others from believing is of the same Guilt as not believing ourselves ; therefore we be very diligent to represent the Doctrine of Christ as reasonable and plain, as He himself has represented it ; — Always remembring our Saviour's Admonition, that we " are the Salt of the Earth ; but if the Salt itself has lost its Savour, wherewith shall things be seasoned ; it is neither fit for the Land, nor yet for the Dunghil, but to be cast out and trodden under-foot of Men." We are to " preach the Word ; be instant in Season, out of Season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all Longsuffering and Doctrine." For, admitting our Opinions to be just and true, as we are assured they are ; yet if we would recommend these Truths effectually to those who oppose them, we must procure them a fair hearing, which can only be done by Love & Goodwill, by kind Usage and gentle Treatment, thus shewing ourselves well-affected to those whom we endeavour to convince. If, on the contrary, we discover any Signs of Enmity & Disaffection, will not Men be naturally prejudiced against all that we can produce ; and be the Means of confirming and hardening Persons of unstable Minds in the Prejudices which they may have taken up against it ?

Whoever, therefore, would acquit themselves as worthy Advocates for Christianity, must take care to abstain from all unbecoming Heat and Passion, from Insolence and Scurrility, from all reviling and railing at Men for their Infidelity ; and endeavour only with the " Words of Truth & Soberness," with a calm, meek, & benevolent Disposition, " to convince Gainsayers," and establish them in the true Faith of the Gospel.

To content thus for Christianity, with the Spirit which Christianity itself inspires, is the most likely

Mocking at Sin,
Folly and Danger of it.

Prov. xiv. 9. "Fools make a Mock at Sin."

It is doubtless a little mortifying to the profane and irreligious, who set up for more refined Parts, more accurate thinking, and a deeper Penetration than other Men, to find so great and so wise a Prince as Solomon, who had considered human Life with so much Attention, constantly ranking them under an opposite Character, and treating them as Fools! This Imputation he not only asserts, but proves from a particular Examination of their Principles and Conduct; and in the Text infers it from this Instance of their Folly, their making a Mock at Sin.

By which it is not meant, that they affect to expose the Vices of their own Life and Practice as absurd and ridiculous. No, their Raillery is directed against the Laws of Virtue and Religion, which forbid them. The Actions prohibited by these Laws they are ready enough to applaud and defend; but

holy Profession ;" to " let their Light shine before Men, that others seeing their good Works, may glorify their Father, which is in Heaven ;" at least, to " give no Offence to Them that are without," lest " thro' them the Name of God be blasphemed among the Gentiles, as it is written." — And,

Y^t Lastly, To exhort those who teach Christianity to others, that, since hindring others from believing is of the same Guilt as not believing ourselves, ~~therefore we be very diligent~~ Means of serving the Cause of it, as it must easily satisfy Men that we have no private End to answer by their Conversion to it, that we design nothing so much as doing them good, by bringing them into the surest Way of living virtuously, and obtaining the greatest Degree of Happiness ; or, if even this Method should have no Effect for convincing an Adversary, he who uses it, will at least have the Satisfaction of reflecting that he has attempted to defend the Gospel in a Way agreeable to its Nature, and without having contributed to the Increase of the Offence which the World has received from the intemperate Zeal of Men in their Debates about Religion.

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which they endeavour to make a Mock at is the Sin
the Condemnation of which is that light
ful Idea, and being detached from the Condemnation
of them as forbidden by God
One would wonder how such a Motive should
induce the libertine Part of the World to be so
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Mocking at Sin,
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what

what they endeavour to make a Mock at is the Sin, the Consideration of these Actions under that frightful Idea, and being deterred from the Commission of them as forbidden by God.

One would wonder, indeed, what Motive should induce the libertine Part of the World to be so solicitous as they are, either to argue or laugh the rest of Mankind out of the Restraints of Virtue and Religion. The Interest even of their Vices themselves seems rather to persuade another Conduct. For, it is certainly a great Advantage to them, in their Pursuits of the Honours, the Wealth, or Pleasures of Life, to have other Men limited by fixed and stated Rules; to know exactly within what Bounds they are confined; how far they can go, and where they must stop; & to be able to ascertain the Point, beyond which they are secure from their Competition, while they themselves are free from all Rules, and at Liberty to make use of any Expedients that appear conducive to their Designs. But here lies the Secret: the Libertine can have no rational Conviction, and consequently no rational Acquiescence, in the Principles he acts on. A Consciousness of Guilt, and its natural Attendant, Shame, hang about him, do what he can. To guard against these troublesome Sentiments, which haunt and interrupt

his

his Pleasures, he finds it necessary to gain the Applause and Approbation of Men to his Conduct. It is the peculiar Privilege of Virtue and Innocence to be able to stand alone. He who is secure in the Approbation of God, can despise the Scorn & Contradiction of the whole World; but Wickedness is naturally timorous. The Libertine finds himself unsupported from within, and is therefore solicitous to confirm his Diffidence, and remove his Shame, by the Countenance of Men. Now,

While the Fear of God, and the Reverence of his Laws, retain their due Force in the World; these Men are sure of being marked out with general Abhorrence & Detestation. Before they can expect any favourable Regard or Credit with Mankind, they must dispossess them of these rigid Principles, and soften their Aversions from Sin. And, by what Methods must this be effected? Serious reasoning the Cause of Vice will not bear; but if they can give a ludicrous Turn to the Argument, and, by a Mixture of Wit with their Profaneness, raise a Laugh on their Side; they succeed as far as they desire; for they know very well, that what Men can be prevailed on to laugh at, they are not apt, in any great Degree, either to hate or fear. Their Dread of Sin, and Aversion from the Sinners, will be gradually lessened

seduced by these Impressions; and if, under any Character, we can be reconciled to the Friendship, and be pleased with the Conversation of the Criminal, we shall not be very much offended with his Crimes.

To correct this prophane Levity in those who are guilty of it, and to guard others from its Impressions, I shall endeavour to confirm the Assertion of Solomon, That it is extreme Folly thus to "make a Mock at Sin. — But first,

It may be proper to premise, that these Mockers at Sin, may be distinguished under two Characters. Either they are such as ridicule all Fear of offending God, and in Consequence all Religion, as Weakness and Superstition; and these can be no other than professed Atheists: or such as care not to go quite so great a Length as this. Some Crimes they will acknowledge to expose us to the Anger of God, & to be justly odious to Men; but others, such as they indulge in their own Practice, or would encourage in others, they represent as light and trivial Escapes; Matters of Jest rather than Conscience, and not deserving a serious Consideration. But the Folly of both these Attempts against Religion must appear, if we consider, — First, What Sin is. And, Secondly, What Consequences must attend making a Mock or Jest of it.

Sin,

Sin, in the Notion which Religion gives of it, is the Transgression of a reasonable, holy, and righteous Law, prescribed to our Conduct by the Author of our Being, on whose Pleasure all that we have, and all that we hope for, depends; the Reproach of our Reason, which it contradicts; the Abhorrence of our God, whose Power and Authority it defies, and whose Guilt, no less a Sacrifice than the Blood of the Son of God himself could expiate.

Consider it in its Effects, and we find it the Parent and Cause of all the Misery we either feel or fear. It was Sin that degraded our Nature from the Perfection in which it was created; that debased us from a Glory little inferior to the Angels, into that weak, passionate, and ignorant Creature we now are; that brought Death into the World, and opened all the Paths of Sorrow that lead to it. All these are the Fruits and Wages of Sin. But it has still more terrible Effects than these: it pursues us into another World, and will there be attended with everlasting Penalties; Horror and Torments which will never have an End. And can this dreadful Evil be a proper Subject for Sport and Mockery? Can we permit ourselves to laugh at what enrages the Anger of our God against us, what brought our Friend and Patron to the Cross, what daily crucifies the

Son of God afresh, and puts him to an open Shame, and what, unless atoned for by the Tears of Repentance, will ruin our whole Nature, and cast both Body and Soul into Hell ?

To him who calls himself a Christian, Sin, under these Characters, must appear the most hateful and terrible of all Evils. If he believes that Gospel which he professes, he knows that the Wrath of God shall be revealed from Heaven, against all Unrighteousness of Men ; that no Sin shall escape the Notice or Resentment of his Judge, but be avenged in eternal Inflictions. When he reflects on these serious Truths, he will find little Inclination to treat any Sin as a light and ludicrous thing, and make a Jest at what may possibly be his own or another's Damnation. The atheistical Scoffers at Sin make a Mock at these Consequences of it also ; and ridicule them as Matters invented to frighten Mankind ; the Artifices of the crafty, or the Dreams of Superstition. But alas ! they will one Day find that there is a God, just and terrible in his Judgments ; when all their Jollity will be changed into trembling, and their Laughter into weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth. — In the mean Time,

Let us condescend so far to the Libertine, as to argue with him upon his own Principles.

Let

Let us consider Sin only under its present Consequences, and see whether he be so wise as he thinks himself, in making a Mock at it. — Now,

What is it that embroils human Society, disturbs the Peace, Order, and Happiness of the World, but Sin? Whence come Wars and Fightings among us, Discord and Contention, Fraud and Oppression, and all the sad Effects of Malice, Envy, Avarice, or Revenge, but from the ungoverned Lusts and Passions of Men? The far greater Part of the Complaints of the miserable, when traced to their proper Source, will be found to arise either from their own, or other Men's transgressing the Law of God.

To laugh at Sin, therefore, is to laugh at Misery, to laugh where a wise Man ought to mourn. It argues indeed somewhat worse than Folly, a Baseness and Inhumanity of Temper, & an Enmity to Mankind, for a Man to delight and sport himself with public Mischief.

Should we see a Man playing with Serpents, and jesting with Scorpions, could we be diverted with the Sight? Would not the natural Passions arising in us upon such a Sight, be Pity for the Ignorance, and Concern for the Danger of the Man? Or if we apprehend any Malice in the Action, a Design to persuade others to venture on these perilous Liberties,

-ties, should we not abominate the Wickedness of the Intention, and with Zeal and Indignation oppose the Success of it? — And can we with Patience behold a prophane Wretch playing with the Sting of Death, endeavouring to abolish the Dread of Sin, and persuading Men to divert themselves with present Misery, and with future Damnation? Folly, in its common Notion, is too mild & gentle an Imputation for such a Conduct; we must aggravate the Idea, and add to it some odious and detestable Images, before it will express it. — That even in its highest and worst Sense, it will properly be applied to this Practice, will appear to us, if we

II. Consider the Consequences of making a Mock at Sin. — Now,

The general Consequences of this Practice must be the prevailing of Sin and Unrighteousness in the World. The Passions of Mankind lead them, by a strong Propensity, to what is forbidden. Our Appetites are always calling upon us to reach out our Hand, & taste something out of the inviting Scene of Pleasure that passes by us; and the great Adversary of Mankind, the Devil, is ever suggesting to us, we may do it safely, we shall not surely die; and all the Fences and Guards of Religion are found little enough to withhold our Compliance. All the

Restraint

Restraints we are or can be under is from them. Were it not for the Fear of offending God, exposing ourselves to his Displeasure, and incurring the Penalties of his Laws, every Kind of Wickedness would soon prevail, and, like a Torrent which has broke its Bounds, overspread the Face of the Earth; and consequently, whatever weakens these Restraints, must, in the same Proportion, occasion the Increase & Overflowing of all Ungodliness. - Now, What can more effectually contribute to this Evil than making a Mock at Sin, laughing at that formidable Nation under which it is ought to be considered, and representing it only as a petty Indiscretion, a light and ludicrous thing? The Idea of the Action is perfectly changed by this Disguise; the proper Penalties of it are hid out of Sight, and only a trifling Inconvenience from the Raillery of Men substituted in the Place of them. A Penalty, (if it may be called one,) which will give the Sinner but little Apprehension, for few are disposed to think they want Wit; and if they can but turn the Jest upon such a Reprover as this, they are sufficiently guarded against any Uneasiness they can fear from him. The Fear of God, and the Dread of his Resentments, are, (as observed,) the only effectual Restraints from Sin. But to keep up the Sense and

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Impression of this Principle, it is necessary that Men should every where meet with some apparent Effects of it. When they see, in all about them, a reverent Apprehension of the divine Presence and Authority; when they hear them, on all Occasions, express an awful Regard to his Laws, and instead of Laughter or Applause, entertain the Transgression of them with serious Reproof and Abhorrence, it gives a quick and lively Influence to the Fear of God. It will reclaim the modest, and check even the most profligate Sinner. The very Shame of appearing less conscientious, less restrained from Wickedness than other Men, will at least correct the open Insolence of Impiety, and keep the public Example within some Bounds of Decency and Decorum. But, when the Transgressions of God's Laws are every where made light of; when it obtains as Fashion, to treat Sin only as a Matter of Jest and Pleasantry, neither Shame nor Conscience will be able to preserve their proper Force. The Libertine will no longer affect to conceal his Crimes, and even the virtuous will be tempted to remit of their Zeal, abate their Opposition, and, by an undue Compliance with the Stream, avoid the Reproach of Affectation and Singularity.

It is to be hoped, indeed, that the natural Reluctances

Effects of Reason and Conscience, will generally guard Men against the Scoffers of the first Kind; the open Atheists, who ridicule all Fear of God, all Restraints of Virtue and Religion, and, in Effect, all Distinctions of Good and Evil. Mankind must be corrupt, even beyond Example, before they can, with Pleasure or Patience, endure such Insults on common Sense and Virtue. But there are Mockers of another Character, whose Success is more to be feared; Men who will permit you to keep a Reserve of Religion, will pretend to agree with you in detesting some Crimes, but persuade you to think others only ludicrous Amusements, which it is Weakness and Superstition to abstain from yourselves, and a morose, unconvertible Severity to censure in others. — Now,

This is a Temptation to which we are exceedingly open. We are fond of any Overture of compound-
ing Matters with God, and will give him any Equivalent for a favourite Sin; and therefore, when we are persuaded to believe the Sins to which the Solicitations of Friends, popular Fashion, or our own Appetites, particularly lead us, to be Trifles of no Moment; and that other Observances, from which we have no Aversion, will secure to us the Expectations of Duty, the Delusion is not easily resisted.

But how fatal must the Consequences of these Notions be to public Virtue, wherever they are entertained? For, while every One will be for bringing his own Vices within the Indulgence as Trifles, not inheriting a serious Regard, whatever Restraint each private Person may lay upon himself, the public Example will be under none at all. Every Vice will have it Patrons, and be represented equally trifling, and reputable, till Men will be neither ashamed nor afraid to commit any; and all Restraint of Conscience, all Sobriety of Carriage, and even the Distinction of Vice and Virtue, shall be laughed out of the World. These are the natural Consequences of making a Mock at any Sin. — And,

Can it consist with Reason & Wisdom to advance such a Scheme as this? To let loose all the wild Passions of corrupt Nature, to range & sport themselves through the Earth? What Deluge and Pettilence can make so much Havock and Distraction in the World, or be so pernicious to the Peace and Interests of human Society? In Solomon's Image of this Folly, it is like a Man who scatters Arrows, Fire-brands & Death, and says, am I not in Sport? And, what does the Fool gain to himself by the Success of his Attempt, but a Share in the common Calamities he occasions? — Perhaps with Fools like himself

himself he may obtain the Applause and Reputation of an impudent Wit; but from all serious and good Men; from all, who have any Regard for the Honour of God, and for the Salvation of Men's Souls, or for the Virtue and Welfare of their Country; Indignation & Abhorrence: and from God, the righteous Avenger of all Contempt of his Laws, the severest inflictions of his Wrath; a Place in the uttermost Hell, with the great Seducer and Corrupter of Mankind, whose Kingdom and Interit he has served. The Time will come when he shall know and feel, that all the Laws of God are the solemn Injunctions of almighty Power; that the Penalties annexed to them are the immutable Determinations of infinite Justice. When Sicknefs or Age shall see the Terrors of the Lord before him, with what Regret and Astonishment will he reflect on those Sins which are now the Subject of his Mirth and Drollery? With what Agonies of Remorse will he then remember how he has gloried in his Shame, and beset with that Majesty whom he has provoked, that the Sorrow of the Penitent may atone for the Laughter of the Fool? From these Reflections I hope it may appear to us, how much we are obliged in Duty, and concerned in Interest, to correct and oppose this vain, irreligious

ous Humour of mocking at Sin. If we seriously attend to the Considerations here suggested, the Nature and Consequences of Sin, the Authority that forbids it, the Misery it derives on Mankind in this World, and the Damnation that awaits it in another, it is impossible we should think lightly of it, either in ourselves or others. We may, with as much Reason and Sobriety, make a Jest of a Pestilence, and laugh at our own or our Country's Ruin.

If the Sins we treat with this Levity are committed by other Men, we make ourselves Partakers with them; but if they are our own, we inflame the Resentment, and double the Guilt of them. For he who is ashamed of his Sin, confesses still the Justice and Obligation of the Law he transgresses; some Seeds of Grace are yet alive in him, which by due Culture and Application may be improved to his Recovery; his Example is less infective, and if he perishes in his Iniquity, he falls alone, and does not involve others in his Ruin; but he who laughs and sports at his Sin, not only offends, but defies God; he declares against the Authority, and disowns the Obligation, of his Laws. Such a Conduct dares Light and Discovery; the Sinner triumphs and glories in his Crimes, and forms a Party against Religion, and therefore will be answerable not only his own

own Commissions, but for the thousands that fall
besides him, and the ten thousands whom he encour-
ages in the same impious Presumptions.

In Order to check this growing Evil, and restrain
an Offence so provoking to God, and so pernicious
in its Effects, on the Virtue and Happiness of Man-
kind; let us every one, with a serious, fixed Attenti-
on, reflect on that holy & dreadful Presence before
whom we stand; that the Inspection of our Judge is
always over us, that it continually attends our go-
ing out & our coming in, that it beholds, observes,
and records every Action of our Lives. Let us re-
member, that for every idle Word we must give an
Account to his Justice; that even the most inno-
cent Parts of our Mirth will escape well, if they are
reckoned among our pardonable Infirmities, But,
where things serious & sacred, where God and Re-
ligion, where the Transgression of his Laws, and the
Penalties he has annexed to them, are the Subjects
of an impious Mirth, be we assured these things are
noted in his Book with the deepest Characters of
Guilt, and will be resented with Fury poured out.
What God hates, he requires us to hate also; and
to express our Allegiance to his Kingdom, and our
Affection to his Service, by an open and public De-
testation of all that offends him.

II. If we can be guilty ourselves of the Levity here reproved, or if we sit passively, and hear others affront his Majesty, and laugh at his Displeasure, must he not look upon us as Traitors to his Interests, and in Confederacy with his Enemies? - Let us then appear with Zeal in the Cause of God, and declining Virtue, and not suffer our Religion, which no Arguments can shake, to be jested out of the World by the Raillery of Fools. - Let neither the Wit nor Figure of the Criminal prevail with us by Applause to encourage, or by Silence to approve his profane Liberties; but let us treat every Sin with the Resentment it deserves, and every Offender with Reproof and Correction.

If those among us who truly fear God, and are concerned for his Honour, would unite in such a Conduct, the Effect of it would soon appear. Virtue would resume Courage and Confidence, and Vice be driven to Covert and Retirement. Credit and Applause would attend Religion, and Shame would be the Promotion of Fools. But, whether the Attempt succeeds in these Effects or not, let us remember that God requires it at our Hands; will acknowledge and reward our honest Zeal, and make us large Amends for any Inconvenience we can suffer from it. But if either through Shame or Cowardice we decline this Duty, of us shall the Son of Man be ashamed, before his Father and the holy Angels.

Sermon

48, 49
Sabbath, but will, like Gold in the Furnace, retain
all its weight and purity, and shine
more brightly than ever.

SERMON —

But then likewise, we have professed himself
to be a free and open Conscience,
should be distinguished to
render his Inquiry honest, — having laid in

**The Sin of
ridiculing Religion,
considered and censured.**

a proper sort of serious Knowledge to inform
his Understanding, and that he might be able to
importance of the matter, he has been led into

**2 Peter iii. 3. "There shall come in the last
"Days Scoffers."**

It would be a great Point gained in the Cause of
Truth, if we could once persuade Men to reason
calmly and dispassionately about it; if they could
be brought to debate on things serious in a serious
Manner, and to govern all their Inquiries, in Mat-
ters of an allowed Importance, by the Rules of De-
cency and Sobriety. No Man that is a real Friend
to Religion, can be willing to oppose a rational Ex-
amination into the Truth of any Opinions or Doc-
trines, that come recommended to us by the Au-
thority of so venerable a Name; not only because
this would be an impregnable Security to Error,
where it had ever taken Possession, but because the
Interest of Truth itself must be injured by it; which
may give Room for Suspicion; when it declines a

Scrutiny, but will, like Gold in the Furnace, retain all its Weight and Purity in the Trial, and shine even with a greater Lustre for the Severity of it. But then likewise every Man who professes himself to be a free Inquirer into Religious Concerns, should bring with him a Mind duly disciplined to render his Inquiries successful. — Having laid in a proper Store of previous Knowledge to inform his Understanding, he must be satisfied of the vast Importance of the Matters he is about to take into Consideration; he must approach them with Modesty and Reverence, examine them with Meekness and Sincerity, and judge of them with Impartiality. Those who are already settled in true Religious Principles would not long be at Variance with such a Disposition as this. But it is one thing, to convince Men who delight in Instruction, and another, to prepare Men to be capable of Conviction. This is a Task of Difficulty and Labour indeed. For whilst a Levity of Mind, an Affectation of Novelty, an undistinguishing Aversion to Superstition, the Self-sufficiency of Ignorance or superficial Inquiry, the Prevalence of Fashion, or Contagion of evil Acquaintance, and, above all, strong Prejudice in Favour of vicious Habits, determine Men severally against the Doctrines and Duties of our holy Religion,

any how shall we go about to explain or enforce either the One or the Other? In vain to such Unbelievers do we oppose the Strength of Reason and Argument, when they lose all their Force merely because they are Advocates for Religion; whilst, for the same Reason, every little plausible Plea that can be urged in Favour of Infidelity is caressed as a Demonstration. And, to aggravate the Misfortune, these are a Generation so wise in their own Eyes, that as they will not give Ear to Admonition, so neither will they be prevailed upon to be silent; obstinate in Error, they labour for Proselytes to it; like the deaf Adder, they will not hear the Voice of the Charmer, and the Poison of it is under their Lips. It is notwithstanding our Duty, with whatever Success it may be attended, to persevere in recommending the Interests of Christ & his Religion, by the Force of our Doctrine, and by the Example of our Lives; and especially it behoves us, since we place the Success of our Cause upon the Truth of it, that we neither defend it ourselves in such a Manner as to weaken it, nor suffer our Adversaries to overthrow it by Subtlety and Stratagem; and that, as we may be sure, they can be furnished with no Arguments against us from right Reason, so we suffer them not, without Detection, to substitute Fallacies in their Room.

(Vol. vii.)

It

It falls not within my present Design, to enumerate or distinguish by their several Kinds all the Arts of false reasoning by which they pervert the Judgment of Mankind, seduce the illiterate and unwary, and even sometimes perplex the diligent and more learned Inquirer. As Sophistry is their Science, it must be owned that some of them are great Proficients in it, and can furnish out Examples to every Rule. but the Text confines me to the Consideration of a particular Artifice, which, though it has little to do with Reason, and rarely with the Appearance of it, has perhaps done more Mischief in general to true Religion, than every other Craft beside; [viz] that of MOCKERY and RIDICULE. — And,

I am supported in this Assertion by the Authority of some, who, tho' they loudly declare themselves Advocates for the free Use of them upon all Subjects, yet seem to think, that if they had been but seasonably applied, they might have crushed Christianity in its Infancy, — that if the Jews had tried their Wit and Malice this Way against our Saviour and his Apostles, they might possibly have done our Religion more Harm, than by all their other Ways of Severity. — Now,

Tho' we know that Christianity is built upon a sure Foundation which can never be removed, and

accor-

accordingly has from the Beginning surmounted the united Efforts of Mockery and Persecution; (as Christ himself was clothed with a Robe of Purple, and mocked, before he was led to his Crucifixion; & as the Apostles of Christ were exposed to the Derision, as well as the Cruelty of their Enemies,) yet so far we must agree, that nothing has done or can do our Religion greater Harm than Ridicule, in totally subverting the Faith of many, and weakening that of more; as it engages the Favour of Mankind to whatever it accompanies. — In speaking therefore to it, I shall show,

First, That an Inclination to Ridicule is apt to lead Men off from any serious Inquiries at all: that it cannot in itself avail to the Discovery or the Trial of religious Truths; and that the Practice of it is neither a proper nor effectual Method to promote the Interest of them.

II. I shall observe how those who pretend most to this Talent of Ridicule do in Reality employ it; and shall expostulate with them a little upon their Conduct. — And then,

Lastly, (In Order to render this Discourse more useful;) I shall briefly recommend some Means of securing our Religion and ourselves against any At-

sacks that may come from this Quarter. — And,

I. If, (as laid down in the first Observation,) a Fondness for Ridicule is apt to lead Men off from any serious Inquiries at all, it will follow, that we ought to be cautious how we indulge ourselves in a Propensity or Inclination to it; because allowing that it might be of Service if properly applied; yet, in all Likelihood, we shall never make that right Application. And, that the foregoing Observation is just, Experience teaches us to be true.

For, whatever Qualities may be necessary to furnish Men with a Talent for Ridicule, yet we shall almost universally find a Levity of Mind to be the main Spring that sets it in Action, as it disposes them to Merriment and to treat every thing ludicrously that falls in their Way. And accordingly we may observe, that what those, who are eminent in this Character, seek after and labour for, is only something to be witty upon: and so fond are they of shewing their Abilities at a Jest, that whenever it occurs, they improve it; whether in Season or out of Season; at Friends, at Religion, and on the most solemn Occasions. Nor indeed is it to be presumed, that Men bigotted to this Kind of Wit will ever lose an Opportunity of exerting it; or that they will be restrained in what they say to Propriety and Decency,

Detency, when Sprightliness and Humour is all
 that they aim at. It is evident that Men of this
 Turn will be impatient, if not incapable, of cool
 and sedate Reflection, and must have a Frame of
 Spirit opposite to every thing that is grave and
 manly. They can be no more inclined to, than they
 are qualified for, sober Inquiries. For how should
 they (can we think) perplex themselves with ab-
 stracted Reasonings, with Examination of first Prin-
 ciples, and pursue a tedious Deduction of Conse-
 quences from them, in Order to settle (what they
 are in no Care to have at all settled,) their
 Thoughts? Is it likely that these should give them-
 selves the Pain of long and laborious Searches,
 which the perverse Disputings of Men have in
 many Cases made necessary for the disentangling of
 Truth, whose Profession is only to make themselves
 Sport? — Or, Is it probable, that they should concern them-
 selves to any useful Purpose with the more obvious
 Duties of Religion, which carries too grave an As-
 pect to recommend itself to such an Acquaintance,
 which condemns all foolish Jesting, and is itself
 the most serious thing in the World? — Indeed,

That Men of this Turn should have made some
 superficial Inquiries into religious Matters, and that

by a slender Application they should have furnished themselves with a Kind of Skill in it which is worse than Ignorance, [viz] that of raising Doubts and Difficulties without knowing, or caring for, a Solution, is as readily to be accounted for, as admitted: because hence is raised their lasting Fund for Ridicule, without which they would have but few Opportunities of displaying their Talent. For as true Ridicule should be levelled at things really & nothing more than absurd, such as are fit to excite no other Passion than the bare Derision of Mankind, so we shall find it to be a Work of too delicate and subtle a Spirit, to be performed by every Pretender to it: whereas there is a Kind of it that is open to the lowest Capacity, which consists entirely in misrepresenting, by a ludicrous Manner, things truly serious and solemn. And the more they are so, the more is the Ridicule heightened by it; as Persons are the more exposed by an antic Representation in Proportion to the Gravity of their Characters. Thus will a Fondness for Ridicule in all Probability prevent Men from entering at all into any Inquiries relating to religious Matters any further than as they will furnish Materials to them for the Exercise of their Wit. — But,

Supposing that it was possible for Men of this

trivial

serious and rational Frame of Mind to busy themselves in earnest in an Inquiry into religious Opinions and Doctrines; in Order to think aright; and to act agreeably to a deliberate Judgment; yet it is further to be observed, that their Talent of Rhetoric would not in the least avail them in this Case, either as an Assistance in the Pursuit, or as a Criterion for the Trial of the Truth.

This will clearly appear from the Nature of Truth itself, and the Means which that will necessarily point out for the Attainment of it. — For, Truth, (as far as Human Understanding is the Subject of it,) consists in the Perception of the visible or probable Agreement or Disagreement of Ideas as they are affirmed or denied one of another. Now, it is evident, that in Order to this Perception, Judgment is the most useful Faculty of the Mind, which is that of discerning and distinguishing between the several Ideas it has. Without this, all our thinking would be nothing but Confusion, and upon it depends the Evidence and Certainty of every Truth which the Mind of Man can, by the Assistance of its own Powers, attain to. And the Nicety and Exactness of Judgment consists in accurately separating, one from another, Ideas wherein can be found the least Difference, thereby to avoid being

missed by Similitude, and by Affinity, to take one thing for another.

Whatever therefore tends to disturb, to pervert, or to embarrass, this Faculty, must in Proportion render us less capable of attaining to, or discerning the Truth.

That Ridicule hath such a Tendency, the very Nature of it will inform us. For as it is properly that Species of Wit, which aims to expose things to Laughter by a fantastical and ludicrous Representation of them, it will so far appear to partake of the Nature of Wit in general, as to lie rather in putting together, in Order to please or surprise, Ideas wherein can be found any distant Resemblance or Congruity, than in a careful Observation wherein they differ: and whilst the great Aim of it is to form burlesque Pictures rather than true Images in the Mind, and of Consequence, be more solicitous to divert the Imagination, than to instruct the Understanding, we shall find, that for once that it will lead us to the Knowledge of Truth, it will a thousand Times misguide us. Nay, in some particular Instances, may not only **PROBABLY**, but must **NECESSARILY**, lead us from a right Notion of things, [viz] whenever it intermeddles with any Doctrines of Religion, that should happen to be agreeable to

bestim

the Truth;

Truth, altho' it is pretended that she can possibly receive no Prejudice from it. For, as it is the End of Ridicule to expose things to Laughter and Derision, and as truly religious Matters have not any thing in them that is liable to this Sort of Treatment, so they must necessarily be disguised & misrepresented by false Colours, before they can in any Degree be capable of it.

Where then will be the Possibility of knowing and distinguishing the Truth, when it shall so resemble Error, that we shall be no longer able to delineate the genuine Features of it? or how can that be an Assistant towards the Discovery of it, which is the very thing that leads us to disguise it.

But further: Neither is Ridicule at all a better Criterion for the Trial of Truth, than it is an Assistant to us in the Pursuit of it.

It is by no Means proving it to be so, by asserting that Truth is to be tried by Ridicule, because it can never prevail against it; that if it be wrong placed, it will recoil upon itself, & be its own Corrector in the End; and that mocking at things truly serious and venerable, fixes a Reproach upon the Understanding of him only that attempts it. For, then we know that Truth will so far prevail, as to be incapable of being made false by any Artifices what-

else, yet may it not, by being ridiculed, appear to
 be so, and lose much of that good Effect which it
 might otherwise have produced? and may not a
 hasty Determination be made to the Prejudice of it,
 before the Ridicule is discerned to be false? Nay,
 may not Persecution, or any other the most injuri-
 ous Treatment of Religion, be as well recommen-
 ded upon this Principle for the Trial of Truth, be-
 cause in the End it will be superior to them? And
 tho' we allow that a Man may, by a Misapplication
 of his Wit, make himself truly ridiculous to those
 who have just Notions of things; yet we must be
 sensible that the Generality of Men are not compe-
 tent Judges whether it be exercised unreasonably or
 not; nor are they able truly to distinguish between
 what falls under Ridicule, and what really deserves
 to do so. And I would ask even those who are ca-
 pable of weighing things in an equal Balance, and
 of making just and equitable Determinations, how
 is it that they themselves can tell, whether Ridi-
 cule is pointed at its proper Object or not? Can it
 be known any otherwise than by the cool Delibera-
 tion of the Understanding, which must take things
 as they are in themselves under Examination, and
 conclude from a judicious Inquiry into the true
 Nature of them, whether they deserve to be treated

indiscreetly or not? Or, can they justify even to themselves their Rallery of any thing, till they have by Reason & Reflection first satisfied themselves? Now, what Kind of a Test that is which must itself be tried by another Criterion, namely that of strict Reason; before it can be admitted as such; when this latter is capable of answering every Purpose much better without it; and how useless such a Rule must be to measure religious Truth by, we may leave to the Determination of every serious and unprejudiced Mind. — But,

The most specious Plea of all in behalf of this Practice still remains, and which carries the greater Weight with it, because it has sometimes been espoused by those who have been indisputably Friends to the Cause of Virtue and Religion.

It has been urged, that tho Ridicule is in no Way to be proposed as a Guide, to conduct us to the Knowledge of religious Truths, or as a Standard to prove them by, yet when they are once established upon their proper Foundation, and have approved themselves to our calm and deliberate Judgment, that then it may be of considerable Service, both in the Defence and Commendation of them; that it may be prevalent to silence unreasonable Opposition, to keep true Piety in Countenance, and to

make Irreligion ashamed. That that Weapon may be successfully employed on the righteous Side, which has so often fought the Battles of Profaneness and Infidelity; or to make-use of an ingenious Allusion, that it is truly useful and good so long as it retains "the Nature of that Salt to which it is usually compared, which preserves and keeps sweet the good and sound Parts of all Bodies, but only frets, dries-up, and destroys, those Humours which putrify and corrupt."

It is not because I would deprive Religion of any Aid whatsoever that can contribute to the Security of it, but because I would have no Auxiliaries called in to its Assistance, whose Fidelity and Services are questionable, that I proceed notwithstanding to observe, that Ridicule is neither a proper nor effectual Method to promote the real Interests of Religion.

As for the Gainayers, it is in vain to think of silencing them by Retaliation of Raillery; who then only are enabled to oppose the Truth with Success, when the Trial of it is put upon a wrong Issue: it never can be effectually done but by serious Argumentation proposed in the Spirit of Meekness and Charity. The former alone will secure our Cause, and the latter will contribute much to win over our Adversaries. Whilst we rely upon strict Reasoning

only,

any Invention to ourselves a sure Foundation; and
 in so far as it is a Recommendation to others of the
 Reasonings it contains. Whereas there is an Acti-
 mony in Ridicule, which will exasperate rather than
 reclaim Men, & make them incapable of receiving
 the Truth by prejudicing them against it; and our-
 selves it will be apt to delude by setting up false
 Lights, and may give our Adversaries an Advantage
 over us by leading us out of the Way.

Much less should Ridicule intrude itself into
 Matters of Controversy betwixt Christians them-
 selves: as it seems to carry in it a Spirit directly
 contrary to that of the Religion they profess; as it
 lays both Parties open to the Scoffs of their com-
 mon Enemies; and as it can only show at last, not
 which hath the most righteous Cause, but which
 hath the keenest Wit, and quickest Reply.

Experience may teach us some of the Mischiefs
 of this Practice: for Instances may be given where-
 in Men have set out in a serious Dispute on Matters
 of Importance, and have seemed to promise much
 Success therein from their Debates, while they were
 confined to Argument and directed by Moderation;
 till Raillery and Ridicule have supplanted Reason,
 and the Point in Question was no longer in View;
 what was before a friendly Contest for the Truth,
 became

became a spiteful Trial of Wit, and from a Difference of Opinion grew an irreconcilable Hatred in the Heart. So much more likely is Ridicule to perpetuate Quarrels, than to decide the Truth.

If upon any religious Occasions, Ridicule seems to be allowable, it must lie with Regard to such Opinions, as are evidently erroneous; such especially as are so big with Absurdities, and so contradictory to common Sense, that it seems below the Dignity of Reason to undertake the Refutation of them. And yet of what Service can it be even in this Case? Whatever gave birth to such Monsters, it is plain that strong Prejudice alone keeps them alive; which even impresses on them a sacred Character. To endeavour to laugh Men out of such Prejudices, is to confirm them the more in them; as their Conversion is never likely to be brought about by such Means as must inspire them with Horror. Rather let Kindness and Persuasion remove the Prejudice, and then the Error will be dispelled of Course.

Neither is Ridicule at all fit to be trusted as proper to promote the Practice of Religion and Virtue, by endeavouring to put Vice and Immorality out of Countenance. These, I fear, are not of so modest a Nature as to be capable of blushing: and if Arguments of a higher & more sublime Kind, and

such

such as are drawn from nobler Motives, will not prevail against them, they are not to be vanquished by being laughed at. The Obligation we are under to conform to the Will of God, which is the Foundation of Duty; the essential and eternal Differences of things, which constitute the moral Distinction between Virtue and Vice; the Conformity of the one, and the Disagreement of the other, to our Nature; and the Improvement or Debasement of it consequent upon our different Choice of acting; are the true Motives to influence and determine a rational Creature. The Love of God to Mankind, and his Abhorrence of Wickedness, exhibited in the Mystery of our Redemption; the Precepts, the Example, and the Sufferings of our blessed Lord and Master; the Life and Immortality which he has revealed; the gracious Promises of the Gospel to allure Men to Goodness; and the dreadful Judgments denounced against the obstinately profane; are still more forcible Motives to persuade and to animate a Christian. If Men's Minds are steeled against receiving any Impression from such Topics as these, it is even a Kind of Presumption to expect it from Ridicule; which besides we are not authorised to make use of, either by Revelation or by Reason. It was not the Practice of Christ

and his Apostles to make a Jest of Men's Vices; but they discountenanced all such Behaviour, as much as might be, both by their Doctrine and by their Examples. Even Solomon himself, who insists so much upon the folly of Wickedness, does not treat it ludicrously as for his Diversion, but speaks of it as a Folly more apt to move Melancholy than Mirth, even as the Folly of Foolishness and Madness. And Reason itself may likewise inform us, that nothing is so likely to lessen the natural Veneration and Awe in Men, with which the Consideration of religious Matters is attended, and upon which in a great Measure depends the good Effect they are likely to produce in the Mind, as a light and ludicrous Treatment of them. Men will be apt to think that things cannot be of such mighty Consequence, which even those who recommend them make so free with themselves, and that neither Danger nor Death is at Hand, where those that denounce them are themselves but in Sport.

Is Ridicule, then, of no real Use at all? and is it absolutely to be banished out of the World?

To assert this would seem too severe perhaps to those, who think they have a Talent for it. But so long as it is left in full Possession of every Folly, of every Absurdity and Extravagance in Life; in short,

of

of all things that are Blemishes in human Conduct, rather than Vices, the Advocates for it will have no Reason to complain that it will ever want Employment. — And, though I have been labouring to exclude it from all Concerns in Religion, even where it offers its Assistance and Friendship, yet I have not done it by representing it in this last Case as a thing criminal so much as imprudent to admit of it: neither do I accuse those who are for enlisting it in the Service of Religion of any treacherous Designs, but have only offered my Reasons why I disapprove of their Judgment.

And if from the foregoing Considerations it shall appear, that Ridicule is not even fit to be allowed of in the Support of Religion, how strong must be the Conclusion, that it never should be employed to the Destruction of it? If it stands in need of Excuse even in a good Man and in a good Cause, how utterly unpardonable must it be, when used by bad Men to bad Purposes? For it is not to be expected that the Pleasantry of Wickedness should take away the Malignity of it, or that Wit should atone for Sin. And yet that there is a daring Tribe of Men, that declare open War with it against every thing that is sacred, we shall in our next endeavour to show, and expostulate with them a little on their Conduct.

Sermon

SERMON —

On the same Subject.

2 Peter iii. 3. "There shall come in the last
"Days Scoffers."

That an Inclination to Ridicule is apt to lead Men off from any serious Inquiries : - that it cannot in itself avail to the Discovery or the Trial of religious Truths ; and that the Practice of it is neither a proper nor effectual Method to promote the Interest of them , have been already shown : I am now, therefore,

II. To observe, how those who pretend most to this Talent of Ridicule do in Reality employ it, and to expostulate with them a little on their Conduct.

As the Christian Religion is adverse to the Inclinations and Passions of the corrupted Part of Mankind, it has been its Fate, in every Age, to encounter the Opposition of various Foes. Sometimes it has undergone the Storms of Violence and Persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the Arms of false Reasoning, and Sophistry. When these have failed of Success, it has at other Times been exposed to the Scoffs of the petulant, Men of light and frivolous Minds, who had no Comprehension of Thought for discerning what is great, nor Solidity of Judgement for deciding on what is true, have taken upon them to treat Religion with Contempt, as if it were of no Consequence to the World. They have affected to repre-

Men of Restraint from Principles, look down with
 Rity and Contempt upon those who are still shack-
 led with them, and have not thrown off all Rel-
 gion to Reason and Conscience. How do these
 Men of unlimited Freedom make Diversion with
 Slaves who own themselves to be under Inspection,
 and accountable for their Actions.

With Regard to the Duties which Religion en-
 joins us to perform towards God, these they attempt
 to represent as idle and superfluous, and owing their
 Birth to nothing but Enthusiasm. What but super-
 stitious Terrors, (say they) could have dictated those
 Forms of Homage, and those Distinctions of sacred
 Days, in which vulgar Minds delight, but which
 the liberal and enlarged look upon with Scorn.

It is Matter to them of, &c. (under)
 or at best depends only upon Custom, and the arbi-
 trary Constitution of human Laws. And, accord-
 ingly, there is not a single moral Virtue, which
 they would not banter out of the World, by mis-
 calling it by some reproachful Name. If we shew
 Zeal for the Honour of God, they will mock at our
 Enthusiasm; - if we worship and fear him, at our
 superstition. Whatever generous things have been
 done for the Welfare of Mankind, will meet with
 no better a Name than that of Folly, or Vapity, or

SERMON —

On the same Subject.

sent the Whole of THAT venerable Fabric, which has so long commanded the Respect of Mankind; which, for Ages, the Learned have supported, and the Wise have admired, as having no better Foundation than the gloomy Imagination of Fanatics and Visionaries.

As the false Colours which such Men throw on Religion, are apt to impose on the weak and un-
wary, let us now examine, whether Religion affords any just Grounds for the Contempt or Ridicule of the Scoffer. And first,

The first Sort of Men that fall under our Notice, are those, &c. (under)

are those who shoot-out their Arrows against all Religion in general; who have no just Notions of God and his Attributes; deny or disregard his Providence; confound all Distinctions of moral Good and Evil; and have no Sense at all of the Dignity of human Nature. These having, (as they call it,) enlarged their Thoughts, and being under no Man-

Designs and all private Goodness will be exposed by them as Grimace, Hypocrisy, and Piousness. In a Word, if Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good Report; if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, if these things they make the constant Subject of their Mockery and Abuse, Ridicule and Raillery. On the contrary, whatever things are profane, and impure, and vile, and dishonourable, these things they are industrious to represent as harmless & indifferent, and to laugh Men out of their natural Shame and Abhorrence of them; nay, & even to recommend them with their utmost Wit.

If these Men could be supposed capable of sober Reflection, I would expostulate with them in the following Manner: What, (in the Name of all that is sacred!) is there ridiculous in the Belief of a supreme, infinite, intelligent Mind, the Creator and Governor of the Universe? Is it not most absurd and foolish to suppose the contrary, if we will but reflect upon the Vastness and Regularity and Exactness of this beautiful System? And may not the surprising Harmony continually preserved in all the Parts of it, very reasonably persuade us, that the great Author of it still holds it together by his Providence, keeping it uniformly in Subjection to the

Laws

have he ſo preſcribed? What is there ludicrous in ſuppoſing alſo this Being to be juſt, and holy, and good, and therefore the ſame God of Order in the moral World, as he is in the NATURAL? That for that Reaſon, he created Man with an excellent Underſtanding to diſcern Good from Evil; and with Freedom of Will, to make him capable, according to his Behaviour, of Reward and Puniſhment? Can it excite any but the Laughter of Fools, when we place the Excellency of Man's Nature in his rational Faculties, and the Juſtneſs of his Conduct in the Regulation of it by Reaſon? What Folly is there in ſubmitting ourſelves to that which was given us for our Guide and Inſtructor? Or how can we find any thing ridiculous in thoſe Actions, which our governing Principle not only approves of, but commands? Is there any thing weak or extravagant in the Reverence and Love of God, in Submission to his Government, in celebrating his Perfections, and acknowledging our conſtant Dependence upon his Providence?

Thoughtleſs as the Bulk of Men are, and attached only to Objects which they ſee around them; this Principle has never been extinguished in their Breasts, that to the great Parent of the human Race, the univerſal, though inviſible, Benefactor of

the World, not only internal Reverence, but external Homage is due. Whether he need that Homage or not, is not the Question. It is what, on our Part, we undoubtedly owe; and the Heart is, with Reason, held to be base, which stifles the Emotions of Gratitude to a Benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any Returns. True Virtue, always prompts a public Declaration of the grateful Sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over all the Earth, Crowds of Worshippers have assembled to adore, in various Forms, the Ruler of the World. In these Adorations, the Philosopher, the Savage, and the Saint have equally joined. None but the Cold and Unfeeling can look-up to that beneficent Being, who is at the Head of the Universe, without some Inclination to pray, or to praise. In vain, therefore, would the Scoffer deride, what the loud Voice of Nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general, and declared Sense of the human Race.

But, apart from this Consideration, we must call on him to attend to One of a still more serious and awful Nature. By his licentious Ridicule of the Duties of Piety, of the Institutions of divine Worship, he is weakening the Power of Conscience over

Men;

Men; he is undermining the great Pillars of Society; he is giving a mortal Blow to public Order, and public Happiness. All these rest on nothing so much, as on the general Belief of an all-seeing Witness, and the general Veneration of an Almighty Governor. On this Belief, and this Veneration, is founded the whole Obligation of an Oath; without which, Governments could not be administered, nor Courts of Justice sit; Controversies could not be fairly determined; nor private Property be preserved safe. Our only Security against innumerable Crimes, to which the Restraints of human Laws cannot reach, is the Dread of an invisible Avenger, & of those future Punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this Dread from the Minds of Men; & you strengthen the Hands of the Wicked, & endanger the Safety of human Society.

But how could Impressions so necessary to the public Welfare be preserved, if there were no religious Assemblies, no sacred Institutions, no Days set apart for divine Worship, in Order to be solemn Remembrancers to Men of the Existence, and the Dominion of God; and of the future Account they have to give of their Actions to him? To all Nations of Men, the Sentiments which public Religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial.

But with Respect to the inferior Classes, it is well known, that the only Principles which restrain them from evil, are acquired in the religious Assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the Advantages of regular Education, ignorant, in great Measure, of public Laws, unacquainted with those refined Ideas of Honour and Propriety, to which Others of more Knowledge have been trained; were those sacred Temples deserted to which they now resort, they would be in Danger of degenerating into a ferocious Race, from whom lawless Violence was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any Degree of Levity and Scorn, is acting the Part, (perhaps without his seeing or knowing it,) of a public Enemy to Society. He is precisely the "Madman," (described in the Book of Proverbs,) "who casteth Firebrands, Arrows, and Death; and saith, am I not in Sport?" We shall hear him, at Times, complain loudly of the Undutifulness of Children, of the Dishonesty of Servants, of the Tumults and Insolence of the lower Ranks; while he himself is, in a great Measure, responsible for the Disorders of which he complains. By the Example which he sets of Contempt for Religion, he becomes accessory to the manifold Crimes, which that Con-

tempt occasions among others. By his scoffing at sacred Institutions, he is encouraging Men to Un-
 -rour & Violence; he is emboldening the false Wit-
 -nesses to take the Name of God in vain; and is, (in
 Effect,) putting Arms into the Hands of the Assas-
 -sin; and letting loose the Thief and the Robber by
 Night. — But further,

With Respect to that great Class of Duties, which
 regard our Conduct towards our Fellow-creatures,
 [viz] Justice, and Honesty, and Integrity, & Bene-
 -volence towards Men; the absolute Necessity of
 these to general Welfare is so apparent, as to have
 secured them, in a great Degree, from the Attacks
 of the Scoffer. He who should attempt to turn Jus-
 -tice, Truth, or Honesty, into Ridicule, would be
 avoided by every One. To those who had any Re-
 -mains of Principle, he would be odious. To those
 who attended only to their Interest, he would ap-
 -pear a dangerous Man. But, though the social Vir-
 -tues are treated in general as respectable and sacred,
 there are certain Forms and Degrees of them, which
 have not been exempted from the Scorn of the Un-
 -thinking. That extensive Generosity, and high
 Public-spirit, which prompt a Man to sacrifice his
 own Interest, in Order to promote some great gene-
 -ral Good; and that strict and scrupulous Integrity,

which will not allow one, on any Occasion, to depart from the Truth; have often been treated with Contempt by those who are called Men of the World. They who will not stoop to flatter the Great; who disdain to comply with prevailing Manners, when they judge them to be evil; who refuse to take the smallest Advantage of others, in Order to procure the greatest Benefit for themselves; are represented as Persons of romantic Character, and visionary Notions, unacquainted with the World, and unfit to live in it. — But, M

Persons of this Character, are so far from being liable to any just Ridicule, that they are intitled to a Degree of Respect, which approaches to Veneration. For they are, in Truth, the great Supporters and Guardians of public Order. The Authority of their Character overawes the giddy Multitude. The Weight of their Example retards the Progress of Corruption; checks that Relaxation of Morals, which is always too apt to gain-ground insensibly, and to make Inroads on every Department of Society. Accordingly, it is this high Generosity of Spirit, this inflexible Virtue, this Regard to Principle, superior to all Opinion, which has ever marked the Characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public Life; who have patronised

personified the Cause of Justice against powerful Oppressors; who, in critical Times, have supported the falling Rights and Liberties of Men; and have reflected Honour on their Nation and Country. Such Persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived; but Posterity has done them ample Justice; and they are the Persons, whose Names are recorded to future Ages, and who are thought and spoken of with Admiration.

The mere Temporizer, the Man of accommodating Principles, and inferior Virtue, may support a plausible Character for a while among his Friends and Followers; but as soon as the Hollowness of his Principles is detected, he sinks into Contempt. They who are prone to deride Men of inflexible Integrity, only betray the Little-ness of their Minds. They show that they understand not the Sublime of Virtue; that they have no Discernment of the true Excellence of Man. By affecting to throw any Discouragement on Purity and Strictness of Morals, they not only expose themselves to just Contempt, but propagate Sentiments very dangerous to Society. For, if we loosen the Regard due to Virtue in any of its Parts, we begin to sap the Whole of it. No Man, (as it has been often said,) becomes entirely profligate at once. He deviates

Step by Step, from Conscience. If the loose Casuistry of the Scoffer were to prevail, open Dishonesty, Falschood, and Treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying Principles, those Relaxations of Virtue, which he would represent to be necessary for every Man who knows the World.

As to Temperance, Sobriety, and Chastity, tho' they are common Subjects of Derision, (as excluding Men from the Company of the fashionable and the gay; Habits, which are the Effect of low Education, or of mean Spirits, or of mere Feebleness of Constitution; while Scoffers, "walking," (as it is too truly said of them by the Apostle,) after their Lulls," boast of their own Manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited,) yet are upon every Account to be embraced, and have at all Times been held in Esteem by Men of Sense and Worth, being essentially requisite both to public, and to private Happiness. By the Indulgence of their licentious Pleasures for a while, as long as Youth and Vigour remain, a few passing Gratifications may be obtained. But what are the Consequences? Suppose any Individual to persevere unrestrained in this Course, it is certainly to be followed by Disrepute in his Character, & Disorder in his Affairs; by a wasted and broken Constitution; and a speedy

and

and miserable old Age. Suppose a Society to be wholly formed of such Persons as the Scoffers applaud; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the Sons of Pleasure; (i.e. with the Intemperate, the Riotous, and Dissolute, among whom all Regard to Sobriety, Decency, and private Virtue, was abolished; what an odious Scene would such a Society exhibit? How unlike any civilised or well-ordered State, in which Mankind have chosen to dwell? What Turbulence, what Contests and Quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What Man of common Understanding would not rather chuse to dwell in a Desert, than to be associated for Life with such Companions? Shall, then, the Scoffer presume to make-light of those Virtues, without which there could be neither Peace, nor Comfort, nor good Order, among Mankind?

Let him be desired to think, of his Domestic Situation and Connections. Is he a Father, a Husband, or a Brother? Has he any Friend or Relation, Male or Female, in whose Happiness he is interested?

Let us put the Question to him, whether he be willing that Intemperance, Unchastity, or Dissipation of any Kind, should mark their Character? Would he recommend to them such Excesses? Would he chuse, in their Presence, openly, and

without Disguise, to scoff at the opposite Virtues, as of no Consequence to their Welfare? — If even the most licentious shudders at the Thought; if, in the midst of his loose Pleasures, he be desirous that his own Family should remain untainted; let this teach him the Value of those private Virtues, which, in the Hours of Dissipation, in the Giddiness of his Mind, he is ready to condemn. Banish Sobriety, Temperance, and Purity, & you root-up the Foundations of all public Order, and all domestic Quiet. You render every House a divided and miserable Abode, resounding with Terms of Shame, and mutual Reproaches of Infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human Character. You change the Man into a Brute.

The Conclusion from all the Reasonings which we have now pursued is, that Religion and Virtue, in all their Forms, either of Doctrine or of Precept; of Piety towards God, Integrity towards Men, or Regularity in private Conduct; are so far from affording any Grounds of Ridicule to the petulant, that they are intitled to our highest Veneration; they are Names, which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost Honour. — How great then is the Folly & Madness, and Impiety of those, who thus wantonly shoot Arrows against Heaven, that
must

must return upon their own Heads; & who scatter Fire-brands and Death among Men, and say, are we not in Sport? Too much, (it is to be feared,) does the World abound even with this Sort of Men: but the other Class that falls under our Censure is perhaps yet more numerous; which consists of those

Who would be thought to be convinced of the Obligation, and to allow of the Duties of natural Religion, but are declared Enemies to all revealed, and ridicule the Belief of it upon every Occasion with

even tho it shall prove an erroneous One. To laugh at the Public upon any Account, is to be wanting in that Respect which is due to common Society; much greater is the Insolence when private Men venture to deride those things which are the Object of public Veneration.

Whoever, therefore, instead of refuting Errors by Reason and Temper, will treat in a contemptuous Manner what carries with it to others a sacred Character, can only give Offence where he should endeavour at a Reformation, and must show himself to be equally a Stranger to good Sense and to good Manners. And yet this is the favourite Method of Infidelity. Ridicule is the Vein that runs thro' the Writings, and what seasons the Conversation of the Unbelievers of the Age. And then as much Tri

without Disguise, to scoff at the opposite Virtues, as of no Consequence to their Welfare ? — If even the most licentious shudders at the Thought ; if, in the midst of his loose Pleasures, he be desirous that his own Family should remain untainted ; let this teach him the Value of those private Virtues, which, in the Hours of Dissipation, in the Giddiness of his Mind, he is ready to contemn. Banish Sobriety, Temperance, and Purity, & you root-up the Foundations of all public Order, and all domestic Quiet. You render every House a divided and miserable Abode, resounding with Terms of Shame, and mutual Reproaches of Infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human Character. You change the Man into a Brute.

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with all the Malice of Wit. Now, considering the great Antiquity that Revelation lays claim to, which in some Instances, to give a probable Account of things, must have been coeval with Mankind itself, together with the general Belief of it, which, however impaired, has prevailed more or less in almost all Places and Ages: even this alone should screen it from any, &c. (under) —

should screen it from any insolent Abuse of those who disbelieve in themselves; and considering that Christianity itself now pleads a Prescription of near EIGHTEEN HUNDRED Years, and is at this Time the ESTABLISHED Religion of our own Country, it ought at least by those who suspect the Grounds of it, to be examined with Candor, and to be proceeded against with Discretion and Gentleness. For there is a decent Regard due to the Religion of a Country, even tho it shall prove an erroneous One. To laugh at the PUBLIC upon any Account, is to be wanting in THAT Respect which is due to common Society; much greater is the Insolence when private Men venture to deride those things which are the Object of public Veneration.

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umph arises from having thus jested at Christianity, as if they had actually overthrown it by mere Dint of Reasoning. The ancient Enemies of it were no Strangers to this Practice; and the Arts of those have been revived and improved too in these latter Days. The grossest Misrepresentations have received an Edge from Ridicule, in Order to make our Religion despised; that it might finally be rejected of Men. In Order to this, has not the Necessity, nay even the Expediency of Christianity been scoffed at as a Jest? Have not the strong Evidence and Testimonies by which it is supported, all in their Turns, been the Subject of artful Drollery and licentious Mirth? Has not almost every particular Doctrine of it been attacked in the most scurrilous Manner; and the sacred Pages, which contain those Doctrines, been derided, & perverted by ludicrous Quotations to very prophane and impious Purposes? And the better to complete their Design, have not those who, by Christ's own Institution, are more particularly appointed to teach and to defend his Religion, been the standing Mark at which they incessantly shoot out their sharpest Arrows, even bitter Words? And has not their Satire against them been generally of that Kind, which is of all others the most scurrilous and illiberal?

I must here again beg Leave to renew my Expostulations, and to inquire a little into the justifiableness of such Proceedings.

With Regard to the Foundation of Christianity, I would ask of them, whether there is any thing ridiculous in supposing, (what cannot well be denied,) that all Mankind had transgressed the original Law of God, whether natural only, or also revealed; and that they had consequently involved themselves in the Guilt of Sin: - that God is a Being infinite in Justice as well as Mercy; & that, according to our Conceptions, it is as much the Property of the one, before a Reconciliation with Offenders, to insist upon some Atonement, as it is a Token of the other, graciously to accept it: that his Purity would likewise incline him to condemn Wickedness with the severest Marks of his Displeasure, that Righteousness might be the more effectually established: that accordingly he sent his only-begotten Son into the World, to take human Nature upon him; and in it to be a Sacrifice and Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World: that by an extraordinary Revelation, (communicated at a Time when Ignorance & Vice had almost universally overspread the Face of the Earth, and when the Footsteps of Religion could only be traced in the Ruins that Superstition had wrought,) Vol. vii.

wrought,) he taught Mankind their Duty, (for no Government subsists without Laws;) in a more perfect and explicit Manner, than it had ever been known before; that he fenced in his Laws with the most proper Sanctions, and promised us such Assistance for the fulfilling of them, concurrent with our own Endeavours, as the mere NATURAL Man must want, both as an Encouragement, and as a Support.

This is but an imperfect Sketch of the Christian Scheme; but enough to discover that there is an Abundance in it to excite our Admiration of the Divine Goodness, but nothing for Jest or Ridicule.

With Regard to the external Evidence of this Religion, I would ask, whether (beside the Concurrence of other Testimony) the Completion of many Prophecies, that went before concerning Christ, & the Miracles which he himself wrought, are not a sufficient Attestation of the Truth of it? (*)

As this is too clear a Point to be denied, allowing their Authority, I would ask concerning the Prophecies, whether in Answer to all the Cavils brought against this Kind of Proof, it has not been undeniably shown by the Labours of the Learned, that they are truly of the Date they pretend to; that the Interpretations of them are consistent and warrantable; & that the Jews, to whom they were

(*) See Vol. vi. Page 286. &c.

more immediately directed, did all along apply them to the Messiah, altho' they must know that some of them had likewise a View to other Events: and whether they were not all in general fulfilled by Jesus Christ so minutely, as they never were, nor could be by any other? — And, in Relation to the Miracles of our Saviour, which have been bantered as Illusion, or what is even less than that, as mere Allegories; it may likewise be demanded, whether they have not in general been proved to carry in them all the genuine Marks that it is possible for any true Miracle to have, and whether every one in particular has not been clearly vindicated from the Imputation of some imaginary incongruities with which they have been unreasonably charged?

¶ If the Opposers of Christianity, upon Account of its Evidence, have not seriously taken into Consideration the Arguments that have been brought in Support of it, it would be decent in them to suspend their Wit till they have better informed their Judgment; and if they have, they should confute before they ridicule.

Can the Atheist be sure that there is "no God?" or that he ~~will not be~~ ^{will be} ~~in a future State?~~ ^{in a future State?} The hardest Unbeliever never yet pretended to have Demonstration in this Cause. And if he had, yet all the Comfort, all the Hopes, that could be built even upon THAT, would be but the Hope of a Beast; the Expectation of perishing as if he had never been. — But since there can be no such Demonstration, on the Side of Atheism; the consequent Possibility on the other Side, that there may be a God, proves the Folly of the profane Scots for to be intolerable; — the Probability that there is a God, still increases that Folly; — the CERTAINTY, the DEMONSTRATION, that there CAN NOT BE a God, shows it to be what Voltaire elegantly

wrought,) he taught Mankind their Duty, (for no Government subsists without Laws,) in a more perfect and explicit Manner, than it had ever been known before; that he fenced in his Laws with the most proper Sanctions, and promised us such Assistance for the fulfilling of them, concurrent with our own Endeavours, as the mere NATURAL Man must want, both as an Encouragement, and as a Support.

This is but an imperfect Sketch of the Christian Scheme; but enough to discover that there is an Abundance in it to excite our Admiration of the Divine Goodness, but nothing for Jest or Ridicule.

With Regard to the external Evidence of this Religion, I would ask, whether (beside the Concurrence of other Testimony) the Completion of many Prophecies, that went before concerning Christ, & the Miracles which he himself wrought, are not a sufficient Attestation of the Truth of it? (*)

As this is too clear a Point to be denied, allowing their Authority, I would ask concerning the Prophecies, whether in Answer to all the Cavils brought against this Kind of Proof, it has not been undeniably shown by the Labours of the Learned, that they are truly of the Date they pretend to; that the Interpretations of them are consistent and warrantable; & that the Jews, to whom they were

(*) See Vol. vi. Page 286. &c.

these immediately directed, did all along apply them to the Messiah, altho' they must know that some of them had likewise a View to other Events; and whether they were not all in general fulfilled by Jesus Christ so minutely, as they never were, nor could be by any other? — And, in Relation to the Miracles of our Saviour which he did, he sets forth, in that accumulative Expression, "the Wickedness of Folly, even Foolishness & Madness." For if there is a God, as the Works of Nature sides, monstrate that there is; and Reason itself declares, and REVELATION fully confirms; then That poor Objection of the Scoffers, here mentioned, that all things HITHERTO continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation; and that therefore they never will be otherwise; discovers the extreme Shortness of Those Men's Understandings, who consider not that God with much Long-suffering gives Men Space of Repentance; and can as easily Judge the World after a thousand Years, as after One Day. — Again,

If we proceed to examine, &c. (under)

If we proceed to examine into the intrinsic Value of our Religion, are the Doctrines of it a fit Subject for Derision, which are beyond Dispute a better System of Morality, than is to be collected from the

Wisdom of Philosophy scattered thro' all the Writings of the World beside? And if there are some few more speculative Ones, (which may have their moral Uses too, to exercise and try our Faith, whether we will exalt it against God,) relating to the Divine Essence, and to the Work of Man's Redemption, which may be attended with some Difficulties inexplicable by human Understanding, are they therefore to be rejected with Mockery, because the whole Mystery of God's wonderful Dispensations is not laid open fully to our View; or because we cannot comprehend the Manner of an infinite Existence, tho' we are absolutely Strangers to that of our own? Or is it fit that the sacred Books themselves, the Repository of these Doctrines, which are the Refuge, the Consolation, and Delight, of every good Man, should be trodden under-foot and ridiculed by the Profane and the Scoffer? Or is it a sufficient Justification of such Usage, because Men will venture rashly to pronounce upon them, without any one requisite Qualification; or because some particular Expressions and Passages in them, occasioned by the Peculiarities of the Language, or of the Manners and Customs of a remote Age, give Offence to those, whose Extent of Knowledge reaches only to modern Notions and Practices?

Or

(*) This one Observation, if duly weighed, is sufficient to silence the Cavils of the Scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole System of Nature around him is full of Mytery? What Reason, then, had he to suppose, that the Doctrines of Revelation, proceeding from the same Author, were to contain no mysterious Obscurity? All that is requisite for the Conduct of Life, both in Nature and in Religion, divine Wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As Nature has afforded us sufficient Information concerning what is necessary for our Food, for our Accommodation and Safety; so Religion has plainly instructed us in our Duty towards God, and our Neighbour. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards Objects that lie beyond our immediate Sphere of Action, our Curiosity is checked; and Darkness meets us on every Side. What the Essence is of those material Bodies which we see and handle; how a Seed grows up into a Tree; how a Man is formed in the Womb; or how the Mind acts on the Body, after it is formed; are Myteries of which we can give no more Account, than of the most obscure and difficult Parts of Revelation. We are obliged to admit the Existence of the Fact, tho' the Explanation exceeds our Faculties.

After the same Manner, in Natural Religion, Questions arise concerning the Creation of the World from nothing, the Origin of Evil under the Government of a perfect Being, and the Consistency of human Liberty with divine Prescience, which are of as intricate Nature, and of as difficult Solution, as any Questions in Christian Theology.

We

Consequently, it is all becoming, that those who by the Appointment of Christ himself are the Guardians and Teachers of his Doctrine; should upon that very Account alone, be exposed to Ridicule and Mockery, to Scorn and Abuse. But if that which ought to raise their Character tends only to deprecate it, and if the Scoffers are resolved to despise all Men in their Idioms, that have any peculiar Relation to the Religion of Christ; yet other Considerations should induce them to be more decent in their Behaviour, and to put some Restraint upon their Tongues.

Some Motive to this it should be to reflect, that the Clergy are under the common Protection of the same Civil Government with themselves, and have therefore a Title to common Civility, even by Virtue of the Laws of their Country: that they are Men of a liberal Education; that they may be duly qualified for, and are sequestered from every inconsistent Employment; that they may without Interruption attend upon the Services of Religion: that it is by no Means Matter of just Offence, that some also amongst them, should by their Station and Authority have a proper Influence to guard the Interests of it; that they do in general discharge their Duty conscientiously and well, teaching the Religion of

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Wisdom of Philosophy scattered thro' all the Writings of the World beside? And if there are some few more speculative Ones, (which may have their moral Uses too, to exercise and try our Faith, whether we will exalt it against God,) relating to the Divine Essence, and to the Work of Man's Redemption, which may be attended with some Difficulties inexplicable by human Understanding, are they therefore to be rejected with Mockery, because the whole Mystery of God's wonderful Dispensations is not laid open fully to our View: or because We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the Secrets of Providence, any more than into the Mysteries of the Godhead. In all his Ways, the Almighty is a "God that hideth himself. He maketh Darkness his Pavilion. He holdeth back the Face of his Throne; and spreadeth a thick Cloud upon it."

Instead, therefore, of its being any Objection to Revelation, that some of its Doctrines are mysterious, it would be much more strange & unaccountable, if no such Doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in the Christian System been perfectly Level to our Capacities, this might rather have given ground to a Suspicion, of its not proceeding from God; since it would have been then so unlike to what we find, both in the System of the Universe, and in the System of natural Religion. Whereas, according as Matters now stand, the Gospel has the same Features, the same general Character, with the other two, which are acknowledged to be of divine Origin; plain & comprehensible, in what relates to Practice; dark and mysterious, in what relates to Speculation and Belief. (See this Argument fully pursued and placed in a strong Light, by the masterly Hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*.) The Cavils of the Scoffer, therefore, on this Head, are so far from having any just Foundation, that they only discover his Ignorance, & the Narrowness of his Views.

(†) All Arguments against the Word of God are Fallacies, all Conceits against it Delusions, all Derisions against it Blasphemies, and all Oppositions against it Madness.

Confessly, is it not all becoming, that those who by the Appointment of Christ himself are the Guardians and Teachers of his Doctrine; should upon that very Account alone, be exposed to Ridicule and Mockery, to Scorn and Abuse; But if that which ought to raise their Character tends only to depreciate it, and if the Scoffers are resolved to despise all Men in their Hearts, that have any peculiar Relation to the Religion of Christ; yet other Considerations should induce them to be more decent in their Behaviour, and to put some Restraint upon their Tongues.

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Christ in its primitive Purity; defending it by their Learning, of which perhaps no Order of Men in the World has a larger Share; and adorning it by the Integrity of their Lives: that where some are ignorant or vicious, the Reproach should fall upon the Persons culpable, & not upon the Order; but that they rather should be counted worthy of double Honour, who have maintained the Dignity of their Character, and preserved it without Spot or Blemish.

But this Practice, however reasonable in itself, is not to be expected from the Scoffers: for as Decency is near allied to Virtue, we shall find the Enemies of the One to be generally as much Strangers to the Other. — Leaving them, therefore, to their own Conduct, I shall proceed,

III. In the 3d. and last Place, to recommend briefly some Means of best securing our Religion & Ourselves against the Attacks that may come from this Quarter. — And first,

The first thing necessary for this Purpose, is a thorough Knowledge of the Grounds & Principles of our Religion.

When we know “the Reason of the Hope that is in us,” it then becomes “an Anchor of the Soul both sure and steadfast;” which will hinder us from fluctuating amidst a Diversity of unsettled Opini-

ons.

— IV. To Vans,

and will keep us firm and immoveable against all the Overflowings of Infidelity: Conviction arising from an Insight into Truth, will inspire us in every Conflict, and will be a Defence against all the Craft and Sophistry and Sting of Ridicule. Secure in the Strength of a rational Belief, the Enemy can have no Advantage over us; nor the Wicked approach to hurt us. But if we profess to teach a Religion that we have only taken upon Trust, as our Notions concerning it will be erroneous, so our Instructions will misrepresent it, and our Defences betray it. An injurious Exposition, or an injudicious Vindication, will prejudice the best of Causes, and lay the Author of them open to certain Mockery and Contempt. — How careful therefore should we be to furnish ourselves by proper Application with all necessary and useful Knowledge for the Service of Religion, lest peradventure we be found to fight against God, even out of a Zeal for his Honour. — But,

Secondly, The second thing requisite for our Security against the Ridicule of Infidels, is Courage and Constancy in our Persuasion; or (in the Apostle's Phrase) *Boldness in the Faith*. Our first Business should be to be well acquainted with the Truth; the next to hold it fast. If we

cannot withstand a little Banter and Ridicule when we have Christ himself on our Side; how shameful must be our Retreat, and how closely must we expect the Advantage to be pursued! We give a satirical Enemy great Opportunities of Triumph; when we give way even so little thro' Fear, Irresolution, or Shame. And well may the great Captain of our Salvation disown such Service as withdraws itself upon being laughed at only, when he insists upon the Fidelity of it, even in the fiery Trial of Persecution. — "Ye have not yet resisted unto Blood."

Hear, and tremble at the Consequence of such a base Desertion: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, and the holy Angels with him." — But, if we have Boldness in him; we shall find it to be our Security here, as well as our Confidence, (when we most shall want it,) at the Day of Judgment.

Thirdly, A third thing which may be a Defence to us against the Slanders, is that truly Christian Temper, a Spirit of Meekness. For a Resolution to defend our Religion, and an inoffensive Manner of doing it, are by no Means inconsistent. This Behaviour is not only in itself becoming, but it is en-

joined sermon is, our Saviour's own express Command, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart;" and this Part of his Character, that when he was reviled he reviled not again.

The Religion of Christ will allow of no Arts in its Defence or Recommendation, that are not perfectly conformable to its Rules. And this Conduct may be particularly useful in blunting those Arrows that are directed against ourselves; as skilful Contenders will oft-times best elude the Force of a Blow, by not bearing up too rashly against it, and yet at the same Time can resolutely maintain their Ground. This, likewise, is the most probable Method of disarming our Adversaries themselves, who must, by this Means, if by any, be won over to a decent Behaviour, when they see that all their Calumny and Spite and Abuse cannot provoke us to a Return of ill-usage; but that our only Aim is, by all gentle Arguments of Persuasion, to reduce them from Error to the Acknowledgment of the Truth, *i. e.*, in short, the Duty of a Christian, not to be overcome of Evil; & it is no less his Duty, to overcome evil with Good.

The last thing I shall mention, necessary for the Security of our Religion, and of ourselves, against the Scoffers, is Holiness of Life.

As unreasonable a thing as it is, to make Christianity accountable for that Wickedness which it utterly condemns, yet we may observe, "that the deepest and most incurable Wounds are given it through those who dishonour it more by professing, than they could injure by denying it. Truth, however bright in itself, may yet be obscured, and lose much of its native Splendour in the Eyes of Men, by the Foulness of the Medium thro' which it is viewed. Such will be the Influence of the Life of a wicked Christian, who is both a Disgrace to himself, and a Reproach to his Profession: But a virtuous and holy Conversation is the Ornament and Defence of both. It renders Religion graceful and amiable to Mankind; and Esteem and Affection arising from thence, will best guard it from every Abuse. But, if it should at any Time fall under Contempt & Ridicule, yet an exemplary Christian will be able to reply with a good Grace to the Scorners, when his own Life is a Vindication of his Cause, & not his Cause, (as too often,) a Condemnation of himself. And what better Support against particular Abuse can a good Man wish for, than a Consciousness of sharing the same Fate with Religion itself? or can he be dismayed in suffering for the Sake of it, when that also bears a Part with him in

the unjust Reproach which he sustains. A religious Man may be ill-treated by an irreligious World: but let this be his Gobolines, that the Stone will soon be changed. Honour, and Glory, and Immortality, will be his Portion, while the insupportable Shame and Confusion shall cover them in the Scoffers. For then shall the righteous Man stand in great Boldness before the Face of such as have afflicted him, and made no Account of his Labours. When they see him, they shall be troubled with terrible Fear, and shall be amazed at the Strangeness of his Salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they repenting and groaning for Anguish of Spirit, shall say within themselves, this was he, whom we had sometimes in Derision, and a Proverb of Reproach. We Fools counted his Life Madness, and his End to be without Honour; how is he numbered with the Children of God, and his Lot is among the Saints!"

To Conclude, When ever we observe any Tendency to treat Religion or Morals with Disrespect and Levity, let us hold it to be a sure Indication of a perverted Understanding, or a depraved Heart. "In the Seat of the Scorners," let us never sit. Let us account THAT Wit contaminated, which attempts to sport itself on sacred Subjects. When the

Scoffer arises, let us maintain the Honour of our God, and our Redeemer, and resolutely adhere to the Cause of Virtue and Goodness, "The Lips of the Wise utter Knowledge; but the Mouth of the Foolish is near to Destruction. Him that honour-eth God, God will honour. The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom; and he that keepeth the Commandment, keepeth his own Soul."

Sermon

And they repeating and agreeing for Angels of Spirit, shall say within themselves, this was he whom we had sometimes as a Disciple, and a Lover of Reproach. We fools covered his face with mud, and his hand to be without Honour, now is he numbered with the Children of God, and his Lot is shared among the Saints!

To Conclude, When ever we observe any tendency to true Religion or Morals with Displeasure and Levity, let us hold it to be a false indication of a perverted Understanding, or a depraved Heart. "In the Seat of the Scoffer," let us never sit. Let us account that Wit commendeth, which attempts to furnish on sacred subjects. When the Scoffer

SERMON

The different Effects
of good and bad Principles.

Matt. vi. 22, 23. "The Light of the Body is the
"Eye: if therefore thine Eye be single, thy
"whole Body shall be full of Light.
"But if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body shall
"be full of Darkness. If therefore the Light
"that is in thee be Darkness, how great is that
"Darkness?"

What the Eye is to the Body, that is the Mind or
Understanding to the Life of Man. When the Eye
is single, (i.e.) clear and free from any Distemper
or vicious Humour, the whole Body is full of Light;
we can then see how to direct its several Members
in their Motions. But when the Eye is evil, when
that is vitiated and corrupted, it either sees things
in a wrong Light, or not at all; and then our whole
Body is full of Darkness, and we cannot direct our
Steps nor order our Goings. So if our Mind and
Understanding be free from any false Bias, from
any

any corrupt Passion, or partial Affection; if our Judgment be right, and our Opinion of things grounded upon Truth; then our Life has a true Guide to rule it, and our Conduct will be wise and right: but if our Judgment be vitiated and corrupted; if our Mind be stocked with wrong Notions and false Principles; if our Understanding be misinformed, and our Conscience erroneous; if, that which should be our Guide, be blind itself; if that which should enlighten us, be dark itself; we have then nothing to direct us, but shall be exposed to infinite Errors and dangerous Mistakes; and the further we go on, we shall be lo much the more out of our Way, without any Prospect of returning.

— "How great is that Darkness!" What Disorder and Confusion shall we then be in! How wretched and miserable must be such a State!

The Words thus explained, naturally lead me to consider, how much it concerns us to keep our Minds free from any vicious Passion, or inordinate Affection; the great Importance of preserving our Judgment clear and uncorrupt, of having our Understandings rightly informed, and being under the Influence of true and stable Principles; since this is our greatest Security against Sin and Error, & will give a right Turn to our Life and Actions.

In

In treating on this Subject, I shall briefly, and in general, show,

First, The Influence which Men's Principles have upon their Practice.

II. I shall distinctly consider the different Effects of good and bad Principles. — From whence it will be evident,

III. How much it concerns us to furnish our Minds with good Principles, and to take care that no ill Principle whatever prevails over us.

Concluding with a few Inferences and Observations from the Whole. — And,

First, I am briefly, and in general to show the Influence which Men's Principles have upon Practice.

The Judgment of the Mind is the Guide of Life; and, (for the most Part,) Men's outward Actions are governed by their inward Sentiments and Opinions. They form to themselves some Design, and lay down some Principle or other; and this, whatever it be, gets the Ascendant of every thing else, is most of all in their Minds, and has the prevailing Sway in their Actions. And whatever this Principle or Judgment be, they generally act accordingly.

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Whatever we judge most valuable, and set our Heart upon, it will partake most of that Object. If our Hearts be set upon Riches, they will mind earthly things, and our whole Man will be engaged in laying-up Treasures in this World. If sensual Pleasure be our chief Delight, we shall be immersed in the Body, "our God will be our Belly," and we shall study nothing so much as the Gratification of our bodily Appetites and Inclinations. If we place our Happiness in being applauded by others, we shall be carried away with Pride and Vain-glory, calculate all our Actions for public View, and do any thing that is bad to obtain the good Word and the good Opinion of Men. But if instead of thus judging, if instead of setting the greatest Value upon this World's Goods, and letting our Hearts be captivated with the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life; we esteem these things to be of an indifferent Nature, and of inferior Concern; and are persuaded that there are other things within our Reach of infinitely greater Consequence; this will raise our Minds to other Contemplations than those Men indulge, who look not beyond this Earth, and to the perishing things which are here.

This will give a new Turn to our Thoughts, and

put us upon other Pursuits. Instead of striving to please Men, and gain popular Applause; we shall study to recommend ourselves to our heavenly Father, and seek the Honour which cometh from God only." Instead of laying up for ourselves Treasures upon Earth, and labouring for the Meat that perishes; we shall lay up for ourselves Treasures in Heaven, and desire that Meat which endureth to eternal Life. In a Word, we shall then choose what is absolutely best, and cleave to what is best, and pursue it, without ever deviating or swerving from it in any of our Actions. Such is the Influence which Men's Principles have upon their Practice; they give a Tendency and Lead to all their Actions, and the general Course and Bent of their Lives depends upon them.

And thus it must needs be, as long as Men do not act by any natural Necessity, by any blind Instinct or Impulse, nor are under the Power of giddy Chance, or over-ruling Fate and Destiny, but are rational and free Agents, and left to their own Liberty and Choice: they cannot but be determined by their Judgment and Opinion of things, & square their Actions according to the Notions and Principles they have imbibed. The Reason of their Minds will be the Rule of their Practice, and their

Passions and Affections, will follow their present Judgment.

Whether they reason well or ill, whether they judge right or wrong, is another Question. But there can be no Question made, whether their Conduct & Behaviour be influenced & guided by their Notions and Sentiments. — I proceed therefore,

II. To consider more distinctly, the different Effects of good and bad Principles. — And,

First, Of the good Effect and Influence of good Principles.

If "our Eye be single," (i.e.) if we are free from all false Notions and corrupt Opinions; if we have a true Judgment of what is our chief Happiness, and wherein it consists, what is the great End of Life, and what are the Ways which lead to that End: "our whole Body will be full of Light," and (as St. Luke adds,) "having no Part dark, the whole shall be full of Light, as when the bright Shining of a Candle doth give thee Light." Discretion will then guide us, and Understanding will keep us; and our whole Life and all our Actions will be ordered right, & have an uniform Tendency to promote our true Interest. We shall then be steady & constant in the Pursuit of the "one thing needful," without either ceasing in it, or diverting to any other End.

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This will prove our best Security both against the Enticements of our own Lusts and the Allurements of the World. Whatever Temptations we meet with, (and many we must expect to meet in every State and Condition of Life;) will lose their Force, and easily be repelled, if we have firm and stable Principles of Piety and Virtue, "if our Eye be single," if we be at Unity with ourselves; & it be our settled Judgment and fixed Principle, in no Case, and upon no Account whatever to forsake God's righteous Judgments.

The Man that has a true Principle of Honesty and Honour, will scorn to oppress or defraud his Neighbour, even his greatest Enemy, though he could do it with never so much Secrecy and Safety. He will never violate his Conscience; nor part with his Integrity, though he could gain the World by so doing. For he does not believe right and wrong, honest and dishonest, to be defined only by Law, and not by Nature; if he did, wherever he could escape the Law, he would think himself at Liberty: but he believes himself to be under Obligations antecedent to all human Constitutions: and this furnishes him with other Measures of moral Rectitude and Pravity, and more steadfast Principles of Action. He that firmly believes the unspeakable Joys and

endless Happiness of another Life, will never be captivated and ensnared by sensual Pleasures, and drawn into a Forgetfulness of himself and the great things he is designed for; but will consider that he is a Stranger and a Pilgrim here; and will, for that Reason, abstain from those fleshly Lusts which war against the Soul.

Whenever he has Occasion offered him of making a Figure in the World, and raising his Name and Reputation by unlawful Means, he will remember that he is the Servant of God, and will recommend himself to him, however he may be condemned or approved by Men. Whatever Provocations he may meet with to Anger and Envy, Malice and Revenge, or any other irregular Passion, he will still be Master of himself, and keep within due Bounds. His Principles will make him steadfast and unmoveable, or at least will hinder him from being transported into any unjustifiable Excess. Of whatever Kind the Temptation be which assaults him, he is ready furnished with Considerations which will enable him to bear up against it. Whatever solicits him, his Answer is still the same: "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of Men." As long as he keeps his Eye single,

and

and his Judgment uncorrupted; while he retains a true Principle of Virtue, and a Relish for spiritual things; as long as his Eye is fixed upon the one thing needful, & it is his Judgment that he ought to pursue that, whatever becomes of every thing else: he will see things in a clear and distinct Light, and will not easily be imposed upon through the Deceitfulness of Sin.

And if at any Time he falls, through Weakness of Inadvertency, Ignorance or Surprize, he will quickly see his Error, and recover himself out of the Snare of the Devil. The good Principles which he always carries with him, and which are rooted in him, will, through the Grace of God, prove a powerful Means of raising him up. He will reflect with Shame, that he has deserted the Cause he had espoused, forsaken the Rule he was to walk by, acted contrary to his own Maxims. And this will make him uneasy till he has got again into the right Way, till he has corrected what was amiss, and brought his Practice to an Agreement with his Principles.

Such is the good Effect and Influence of a single Eye, of a sound Judgment, and firm Principles of Religion and Virtue. This is the best Preservative against Sin and Error, & the most effectual Means for our Recovery whenever we fall.

Which will more fully appear, if we consider,
 adly, The ill Influence and Effect which bad Principles have upon us.

It is necessary for us, have some Principles or other, if we would have our Life answer any Purpose. Without this, we are like the double-minded Man, who is (as St. James describes him,) unstable in all his Ways, who has no particular Interest to serve, but is divided between several; between the Interest of this World, and of the Other. Such a Man is always weak and wavering, unstable and inconstant in all his Actions. He has several Ends to serve, which many Times cross one another and so he pursues neither of them Readily.

This is the Condition of a Man that hath no Principles at all.

Next to this, it is as bad to have no good Principles, no true Principles of Religion and Virtue; for without these we shall be exposed to every Temptation, and liable to change with every Wind.

Having no fixed Principle within us; we shall adhere to nothing upon any firm Grounds; but shall be ever varying, as the Complexion of our Body, or the Temper of the Mind, or the Circumstances of external Affairs happen to alter. We shall be superstitious at one Time, careless or prophane at a-

another, now sceptical, and then positive; of One Religion to Day, and of Another to Morrow; and the next of neither, and at last, perhaps, of no Religion at all. As long as the World goes well with such a Man as this, and he finds his Interest in his Duty, he will be loyal to his Prince, true to his Country, & faithful to his Friend: but whenever Times alter, and these Virtues become the Object of Scorn and Reproach, and cannot be practised without apparent Hazard to his own private Interest, he will basely desert them, and will be sure to save himself, whatever becomes of the World beside. And this will put him upon any Acts of Treachery and Injustice, of Force or Fraud, which are necessary to compass his Self-ends.

Thus insecure will THAT Man be of himself, who wants the single Eye, who is destitute of good Principles; and such wild and contrary Sallies will he be subject to. He is governed only by present Interest or Humour; and upon the least Variation of these, he will quickly be supplanted, reel and stagger like a drunken Man, and be at his Wit's Ends. And whenever he falls, he has nothing to help him; for he has no Principles of Religion and Virtue; which, (as already observed,) next to the

Grace of God, are the best; if not the only Means of reclaiming us from the Error of our Ways.

But now suppose, that instead of the bare Want of good Principles, a Man hath imbibed such as are really bad; that he has an "evil Eye," a corrupt Judgment, & an erroneous Conscience: what Dangers and Mischiefs will not such a Man be exposed to, and what Wickedness will he not commit? He is ready prepared for any evil Work, to which either the Enticement of Sinners, the Suggestions of the Devil, or his own wicked Heart, may lead him. "He walketh in the dark, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the Darkness hath blinded his Eyes." He falls into Mistake and Error, and runs from one Mischief into another, and adds Sin unto Sin. "His whole Body is full of Darkness," and he neither knows, nor observes any Difference in his Actions. The Iniquity he commits, he does not see to be such; but perhaps thinks it to be good, and believes himself obliged to commit it, and therefore commits it with Greediness. For there is no Wickedness so obstinately persisted in, and so furiously pursued, as that which proceeds from Principle, upon a false Persuasion of the Mind. (*)

And

(*) Common Forms are sometimes the most necessary to be explained,

And therefore, if our mind is so distasteful, even by the blasp of good Principles, to preserve our Integrity

plained, there being none more uncertain and equivocal Signification to the greatest Part of Mankind. Every One, (for Instance,) at the first hearing, thinks he perfectly understands what is meant by *Conscience*, *Liberty*, *Honour*, and *Loyalty*. There are few Words, in the Use of which Men more generally agree, but in the Signification of which they are observed more to differ. We hear a thousand other Words daily repeated, & almost in all Manner of Conversation, which those who repeat them, have no clear or determinate Idea of, or rather none but what is very confused, when they are required to give an Account of them.

Conscience, (the Main of our present Subject,) may be thought so very easy and obvious in its Signification, that it is unnecessary to say any thing by Way of Explication upon it: There may be no Impropriety in the Question, whether all Christians do really understand it according to the true Meaning, and due Limitation of the Word; for tho' it is common in the World, yet it is of very doubtful and uncertain, and sometimes of very dangerous Signification; as Men, (tho' they are generally apt to think it a sufficient Excuse for any thing, that they did it according to their *Conscience*, yet,) may be guilty of the most heinous Sins in following an *erroneous Conscience*.

Our Saviour tells his Disciples that "the Time would come, that *many should turn away from the Faith, and will deliver up the Son of Man, who shall deliver them, would think that he doth God good Service."*

Nay, even the Jews themselves, the chief of them, their Rulers, (thro' a false Persuasion of Mind,) "crucified the Lord of Life."

And St. Paul tells us, that, (before his Conversion, in acting according to the Persuasion of his *Conscience*,) he had been a *Blasphemer*, and a *Persecutor*, and *injurious*, and a *Murderer*, and, in a Word, *the greatest of Sinners*.

It therefore most highly concerns Men to consider what Opinion they embrace in Order to Practice, and not to suffer themselves to be

grity, and resist the Temptations we meet with; if the Weakness & Depravity of our Natures be such; that even with this Assistance we cannot always stand upright; what will become of us, if we want it? But, if we not only want good Principles, but our Minds are stocked with ill Ones, we shall then fall with double Force, and our Recovery will be exceeding difficult. When Temptations from without meet with ill Principles from within; they will take fast-hold of us, and we shall be led captive by the Devil at his Will. "When the Light that is in us be Darkness, how great is that Darkness!" "When the blind lead the Blind," it must needs be that "both fall into the Ditch." — Hence it will evidently appear,

III. How much it concerns us to furnish our Minds with good Principles, and to take-care that no ill Principle whatever prevails over us.

What the Eye is to the Body, that, our Saviour tells us, is some leading Principle in the Soul, to the

hurried away by an unreasonable Prejudice, and a heady Passion, without a due & calm Examination of things; nor be over-born by Pride, or Humour, or Partiality, or Interest, or by a furious and extravagant Zeal; for whatever we do contrary to the Law of God and our Duty, in Virtue of that false Persuasion, we do it at our utmost Peril, & must be answerable to God for it, notwithstanding we did it according to the Dictate of our Conscience.

their great Importance,

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the Soul of Man. And it is of as much Consequence to the Soul, that this leading Principle be right, as it is to the Body to have our Eye-light clear & good: and so much more so, as the Soul is more valuable than the Body. If therefore we justly reckon those miserable who are deprived of the Sight of the Sun, who grope at Noon-day as in the Dark, seeking for some to lead them; and instead of that beauteous Prospect which the Works of Nature afford others, are presented with an universal Blank: how much more deplorable is the Condition of those Men, whose Minds are blinded, & their Souls overspread with Darknes, with Ignorance and Error, or thick Mists of vicious Lusts and Passions; who discern not the Beauty of Holiness, nor see the Wonders of God's Laws; but are blind to their true Interest, & sit down in Darknes and the Shadow of Death.

This spiritual Blindness can no other Way be prevented, but by keeping our Eye single, and our Judgment right, & our Reason uncorrupted by any false Principle, vicious Passion, or inordinate Affection. For whenever any thing of this Kind becomes the leading Principle in us, whether Sensuality, Avarice, or Ambition, it will turn us out of the right Way, and lead us thro dark and slippery Places, where we shall find it difficult to keep our Feet, & uphold our Goings.

(Vol. vii.)

If

If our Reason be not the Guide and Superintendant of our inferior Powers, but is under Subjection to them; if it be obscured or extinguished, biassed or perverted by any wrong Motive; every thing will be out of Course, and nothing but Confusion & Disorder will ensue. If we judge amiss, and are under the Influence of any great Error or Delusion; Vigour and Activity, instead of helping us forward on our Journey, will lead us the more out of our Way: Diligence and Industry will prove detrimental, if not fatal to us; instead of promoting our Interest, will procure our Ruin & hasten our Destruction. Every Step we take, upon a mistaken Principle, upon a false Notion of what is our Happiness and the Way that leads to it, upon a wrong Sense of what is our Duty and our Interest; every Step which we thus take, is dangerous, and may end in our Ruin. But, at least, it is so much Time & Labour lost; it is not only going out of the Way that leads to our main End, but it is going directly from it; it is going so far, to return as far back again; it is doing what we must undo, & is making Work for a bitter Repentance. — Whereas,

If we proceed upon right Principles, and act upon true Notions of Good and Evil, of what makes for, or against our Happiness: every Step we take does

their great Importance.)

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really advanced us in the right Way; and whatever we do, in Pursuance of these, will turn to a good Account, and help forward our main End. There will shew be Light, and Order, and Beauty, in our several Actions, and they will all conspire to promote our true Interest. We shall have a clear Prospect of our great End, without any thing to intercept our View, or divert our Course: and we shall steer thro all the Waves of this troublesome World, through all the Mazes and Windings, all the Perils & Dangers of such a difficult Passage, to that Haven of Happiness, that eternal Rest, which remains for the People of God.

Of such Importance is it to have our Minds furnished with good Principles, and to prevent ill Ones from prevailing over us; since upon this depends the wise Conduct of our Lives, the right ordering of our Actions, the obtaining eternal Happiness, and avoiding endless Misery.

To further and promote these great Ends will be the Intent and Purport of the Inferences and Observations, now to be produced. — And,

First. Hence appears the great Usefulness and Necessity of Knowledge and Understanding, especially in Religion, and Matters of a moral Nature.

Vol. vii.

It

It is St. Peter's Advice, that we should "add to our Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge;" and St. Paul's Prayer for the Philippians is, that "their Love may abound more and more in Knowledge, and in all Judgment." And he dispraises one of the most excellent and illustrious things in all Religion, because it was not under the Influence and Direction of Knowledge. "They have a Zeal for God," (says he,) "but not according to Knowledge." And to name no more, our blessed Saviour blames the Samaritans, because they worshipped they knew not what; and prefers the Jews before them, because they "knew what they worshipped."

Of such Account is Knowledge and Understanding in Religion. And this not only because those Actions which are done without the Use of our Understanding, are not the Actions of a Man, but of something that is short of Man, and have no more Virtue in them than the Actions of a mere natural Agent; but chiefly because our Knowledge & Understanding will have the main Direction of our Lives & Actions. Such as our Principles are, such in the Main will our Practice be. If we have right Notions of God and Religion, just Apprehensions of the Beauty and Excellence of Virtue, and of the Baseness and Deformity of Sin, this will not only

put us into the right Way; but keep us in it. But, if we entertain any false Opinions of God and Religion; they will produce many Errors and Mistakes in our Practice; and we shall turn from the Practice of true Piety and Virtue, into a blind Superstition, or an ignorant Zeal, which will betray us into an unwarrantable Course of Proceedings. If we think of any thing worse than of Sin, and are less afraid of it than we are of Poverty or Pain, Shame or Disgrace; we shall soon be drawn into it. And if we prefer any thing before Virtue; whether it be Riches or Honours, or sensual Gratifications; we shall not long retain our Innocence, but shall be ready to give it up to any Temptation we meet with. — But,

2dly, From what has been said, it appears how cautious we should be in the Choice of our Principles: as much as we should be in the Choice of a Guide to conduct us through an unknown and difficult Way.

Our Principles will have the Rule and Government of our Lives; and therefore we should never take them upon Trust, without examining into them, and seeing whether they be sound and good. For if we set out wrong, & build upon a false Bottom, our Work will never abide the Trial: and though we ourselves should be saved, yet it will be, as the

Apostle expresses it, "so as by Fire," (i.e.) it will be difficult, & we shall narrowly escape the Danger.

For though a good Intention will justify an indifferent Action; a thing in itself lawful; yet in Matters directly sinful and unlawful, this Maxim has no Place. It is our Duty, and should always be our first Care, to inform our Consciences, and get a right Judgment in all things; and then to act agreeably to this Knowledge, and according to the best of our Judgment. But if we neglect the first of these, we shall certainly fail in the second, and that Failure will be placed to our Account.

The wise Man files our Reason, "the Candle of the Lord," which he has lighted up in every Man's Breast to direct his Goings; and it is incumbent on us to keep in this Light, to cherish and improve it, that we may see our Way to Happiness, and discern those things which make for our Peace. But if we wilfully obscure or extinguish this Light, by any Impurity or Vice; by any unreasonable Prejudice, Partiality, or Passion; Darkness will then overtake us indeed; but we ourselves shall be answerable for every wrong Step we take, for every Error & Mistake we are guilty of.

To this Natural Light, God has been pleased to add a new and additional Light of Revelation.

His

Means of finding them.

10. &c

His Word as well as our own Reason, is "a Light to our Feet, and a Guide to our Paths." But if we come to the reading of God's Word, with any vicious Prejudice or sinful Partiality; not to discover the divine Will, but to gratify our own; not to find out the Meaning of the Scriptures, but our own private Sentiments and Opinions; even this Light may be turned into Darkness, and we may lose our Way, and follow those Paths which lead to Death, while we have in our Hands the Words of eternal Life.

And, if this be the Case: if by any false Principles, we have taken up any wrong Judgment we have made, any corrupt Passion or Affection we have suffered to prevail over us, we pervert our own Reason, and wrest the Scriptures; we have then nothing to guide us, but shall be abandoned to the Power of our Lust, and the Wiles of the Devil. If both the Light of Nature and Revelation be turned into Darkness, "How great is that Darkness!"

3dly, Hence appears the great Evil & Mischief, both the Sin and the Guilt, of imposing upon Men's Understandings, misinforming their Judgments and instilling false Notions and Principles into their Minds: since this is to betray them to a Guide that will assuredly mislead them, and instead of conducting them to Heaven, will bring them to the Pit of Destruction.

(Vol. vii.)

The

The Methods whereby Sinners endeavour to propagate their evil Principles, and seduce the unwary, are too various and complicated to admit here of a Discussion; and withal, at the first, must be so exploded, as to stand self-detected. For,

The great Lines of our Duty, the natural Knowledge of moral Good and Evil, are so evident to every Man, that, unless we are greatly estranged, by a corrupt Practice, from the primitive State of our Nature, we cannot but discern it at its first Approach towards us; for, "the Knowledge of Wickedness is not Wisdom, neither at any Time the Counsel of Sinners Prudence."

Add to this Law of our Nature, the written Word of God, — Whatever is commanded or prohibited in Scripture, is certainly to be practised or avoided: A Compliance with Others in things directly contrary to it, whatever may be pretended, can never be justifiable; the which, therefore, we should make continually our Study, to assist us in the Improvement of our Knowledge of natural things, in Order more perfectly to discover and guard against all Emissaries to Evil whatever, who should be so ungenerous, as to attempt to seduce us from our Duty, and "from the Hope that is in us."

If Men will wilfully stifle and suppress their own

(MAY 10V)

Reason

Means of seducing them.

28, 29

Reason and Judgment, and resign themselves up to the arbitrary Dictates of Others; there is nothing which they may not be brought to commit and approve. When the Light that is in them is turned into Darkness, How great is that Darkness! & how fatal will be the Effects and Consequences of it!

As it is unreasonable and dangerous thus to consent to the Delusions of others, so it is a more wicked Employment and dangerous to seduce others, by wrong Principles, from their Duty, into Irreligion and Wickedness; for, hereby we become guilty not only of our own Sins, but of others also.

It is no inferior Degree of Impiety for a Man to live in an habitual, wilful, and constant Course of Sin and Disobedience. But, not to be content to do these things himself, without endeavouring to draw others off from the Principles of their Duty, is a Crime too vast for Expression, too vile for Excuse, and so universally destructive of all Goodness, that, without "the Spirit of Prophecy," we may easily tell what the End will be; or, if we cannot, Solomon will instruct us: "Tho' Hand join in Hand," even the united and confederate Malice of wicked Men, "shall not go unpunished;" (i.e.) shall be utterly destroyed in that great Day when the Almighty

mighty shall confide over his Enemies to Misery, which no Tongue is now able to express, nor Patience will then be able to endure.

It will then be found a Matter hard enough to answer for our own Sins, and to bear the Guilt and Burden of our own Transgressions, without having any thing to answer for the Sins of others. But,

When all the Wickedness which Others shall have performed thro' any false Principles of our Persuasion, is to be answered for by us, we shall find by woeful Experience, that we might have employed ourselves and our Time much better; and shall be no less confounded with the Shame, than the Guilt of not having done so. — But,

Lastly, What has been said, should excite us to endeavour after this single Eye, not only as it means in general a sound and impartial Judgment, but in that literal Sense which has already been explained, as it imports Single-mindedness, the having but one grand Purpose & Design, one ruling Principle and Affection, [viz] serving God, and saving our own Souls.

We should, as far as possible, reduce every thing to this single Point, not to have two Masters to serve & several chief Ends to carry on at the same Time; not to have our Treasure in two different Places, &

our

our Happiness in contrary things. But to fix ourselves immovably upon the Attainment of eternal Life and Happiness, and to make every thing we do subservient to this End, at least not to suffer any thing to come into Competition with it.

This is what our Saviour means, when he tells us, that "no Man having put his Hand to the Plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

This is that "One thing needful," which he commends Mary for choosing; while he blames Martha for being "careful & troubled about many things."

This also is the Design of those Parables, where he compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a Treasure hid in a Field, to purchase which a Man sells all that he has; and to a Pearl of great Price, for which the Merchant will part with his whole Substance.

All which intimates and recommends to us the SINGLE EYE, that ONE Purpose, upon which we ought to fix our Minds, & in which all other Aims and Views should center.

While we keep to this, our whole Body will be full of Light, our Actions will be regular, and have a uniform Tendency to bring us to those Regions of Light and Bliss, which are inhabited by wise and holy Spirits. But, if we suffer ourselves to be diverted by any thing from this ONE End, and, while

we pretend to pursue it, have our Eye fixed upon other Designs; our Actions will then cross and contradict one another, and we shall be in the utmost Darkness and Confusion, and shall at last inherit the Folly, the Reward, of our Choice, & have our Portion in that Kingdom of Darkness, where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth; the Sting of Guilt, & the Remorse of Conscience, the most vexatious Shame and Reproach, the most bitter Anguish & Vexation, the Worm that never dies, and the Fire that cannot be quenched.

Sermon

White we keep to this, our whole Body will be full of light, our Actions will be regular, and have a uniform Tendency to bring us to those Regions of Light and Bliss, which are intended by wise and holy Spirits. But, if we suffer ourselves to be diverted by any thing from this one Road, while

As He blessed the Works of his Hands, to their
 good, that the good
 And, **SERMON**

Then "the Morning together for Joy,"
 Repentance,

the Nature and Efficacy of it.

Not a Jar in the whole Frame, but all worshipped
 their Creator; and praised and glorified him
 Acts iii. 19. "Repent, and be converted, that
 your Sins may be blotted out."

In these Words we have the following Particulars
 worthy of Consideration.

I. First, An important Duty enjoined us; [viz.]
 Repentance. "Repent."

II. The Nature of it; here expressed by Con-
 version. "Repent, and be converted."

III. The Power and Efficacy of it. Repent,
 and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted
 out. — These Particulars I shall follow in their
 Order, and then.

Conclude with a serious Exhortation to the
 Duty before us. — And First,

Of the Duty itself, Repentance: "Repent."

The World began with Innocence ; all was **THEN** good, that the good God had made. And,

As He blessed the Works of his Hands, so their Natures and Harmony magnified him again.

Then " the Morning Stars sang together for Joy," and all his Works rejoiced before him.

Not a Jar in the whole Frame, but all worshipped their Creator ; and praised and exalted the Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness of their Benefactor. But,

This happy State lasted not long ; for Man, the Head and Glory of this visible Perfection, being tempted to aspire above his Place, unhappily yielded against Command and Duty, as well as Interest and Happiness, and so fell below it, lost the divine Image, which consisted chiefly in the Purity of his Nature, in which he was made ; and being now no longer fit for Paradise, was expelled the Garden of God, and driven out from the Presence of the Lord.

Hence, commenced the Origin of the Duty of Repentance to our first Parents. And this Stain extending, thro them, to the whole Race of Mankind, whom they represented ; and increased & heightened by the variously multiplied & actual Transgressions of their Successors, renders this Duty a personal Obligation upon every Individual of the Posterity of Adam.

Had

Had Mankind, according to the Law and Command of God, continued ever in Innocence, this Duty of Repentance would never have been known, and Man's Obedience would have consisted wholly as his Nature directed him, in praising God and enjoying him forever: but, being fallen from this innocent, and, therefore, happy State; Repentance, in the fullest Extent and Meaning of it, becomes his bounden and indispensable Duty. — The Nature and true Import of which, I am now,

II. To explain. — And here.

True Repentance, (if we mistake not,) contains in the Notion of it, these five things:

- 1st. A deep and unfeigned Sense of our Guilt.
- 2dly. A just and awful Apprehension of God's Displeasure because of it.
- 3dly. A godly Sorrow and Contrition of Heart for having incurred and provoked it.
- 4thly. A thorough Hatred and Detestation of our Sins, upon this Account. And,
- 5thly. Such a sincere and stedfast Resolution of Amendment as does, through God's Grace, actually produce & bring-forth Fruits meet for Repentance. Or, in other Words, a thorough Change of Mind and Manners; and a sincere Obedience for the Time to come.

1st. True Repentance must necessarily begin with a deep and unfeigned Sense of our Guilt.

This is the very Foundation, and Ground-work of the Whole; this is the only genuine Source of a true penitential "godly Sorrow, which worketh Repentance to Salvation; not to be repented of." No Man can rightly amend his Faults, without being first sensible of them.

This deep and unfeigned Sense of our Guilt, and the natural Consequence of it, an humble & devout Acknowledgement and Confession of it before God, are so essentially necessary to true Repentance, that the Scriptures lay the whole Stress of this Matter upon these two Points, as virtually including each other. For he that is deeply and duly sensible of his Guilt; does in Effect condemn, & confess himself in the Sight of God; and he that confesses his Sins to God, as he ought to do, must do it with the fullest Conviction, and with the most lively and affecting Sense of the exceeding Heinousness of them.

Thus, after God had denounced a long Train of Woes against the Children of Israel, in Case of their Disobedience; He says thus: "If they shall confess their Iniquity, & the Iniquity of their Fathers, with their Trespas which they have trespassed against me, and also that they have walked contrary

"unto

"unto me;" - "and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the Land of their Enemies. If their uncircumcised Hearts be humbled, and they then accept the Punishment of their Iniquity: Then will I remember my Covenant with Jacob, and also my Covenant with Isaac, and also my Covenant with Abraham will I remember."

Here we find, that Confession of Sins, a deep and unfeigned Sense of the Guilt of them, and an humble Acknowledgement of God's Justice in the Punishment of them, are insisted upon as the Conditions, upon which alone the Pardon of them is to be obtained. — Thus again,

When Nathan rebuked David in the Matter of Uriah; "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." This humble Confession of his Sin was accompanied with such a deep and unfeigned Sense of his Guilt, as rendered his Repentance acceptable to God. "And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy Sin; thou shalt not die." And for this Reason, the Royal Penitent, being now in a Transport of Joy, upon his being restored to the divine Favour, speaks thus in that Song of Deliverance which he composed upon the Occasion. "I will acknowledge my Sin unto Thee; and

"mine Unrighteousness, have I not hid. I said, I will confess my Sins unto the Lord: and so thou forgavest the Wickedness of my Sin."

And to the same Purpose his Son Solomon: "He that covereth his Sins, shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth & forsaketh them, shall have Mercy."

And St. John to the like Effect: "If we confess our Sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanse us from all Unrighteousness."

From all which Passages it appears, that we must beget in our Minds, and imprint upon our Hearts, the deepest and most unfeigned Sense of our Guilt; before we can repent to any good Purpose. The Pharisee in the Gospel; who was full of himself and his own Righteousness; could not possibly become better: so long as he entertained such high Opinion and Conceit of himself, & saw no Faults to amend, he could not perceive any Necessity of Amendment; so long as he continued to approve his own Conduct and to appear righteous in his own Eyes, he must necessarily continue both to judge and to act amiss. And for this Reason he was rejected of God. Whilst the Publican, who entertained a due Sense of his own Unworthiness, and humbled himself for it in the Sight of God, was graciously accepted by him.

We must therefore endeavour to possess ourselves
 with a deep and affecting Sense of the exceeding
 Depravity & Odiousness of Sin: the excessive Base-
 ness of its Nature: and the infinite Danger which
 attends it: and these Considerations must sink deep
 into our Hearts, and work in us the most serious &
 settled Conviction of its fatal and destructive Ten-
 dency, if unrepented of, and unforgiven. — And,
 To this End, we must consider it, as the wilful Vil-
 lation of the most perfect Rule: as the voluntary
 Transgression of the great Law of our Nature: — as
 a presumptuous Contradiction, and daring Opposi-
 tion, to the eternal and immutable Rules of the di-
 vine Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness: — as a
 manifest Contempt of the divine Authority, and
 of the revealed Will of God: as a bold Indignity,
 and open Defiance to the supreme Judge, and mor-
 tal Governor of the World: — as the most outra-
 geous Insult to the most powerful and beneficent,
 the most just and holy, to the greatest, and kindest,
 and best of Beings: — as the basest Return for
 all his wonderful Kindnesses & Goodnesses, and Love
 to us: — as the greatest Abuse of his astonishing For-
 bearing and Long-suffering towards us: — & above
 all as the most shameful Ingratitude to our Hea-
 venly Father, for his inestimable Love in the Re-
 demption

redemption of the World by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the true Light in which we ought to consider our Sins. And therefore we should not only reflect within ourselves; how unlike to God our Sins make us, - how unworthy of his Favour, - how odious they render us in his Sight, and how justly obnoxious to his eternal Vengeance; but we should likewise consider, that every Sin, which we willingly and wilfully commit, does in Reality "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame;" that we do thereby profanely "tread under-foot the Son of God, and count the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy thing, & do Despight to the Spirit of Grace;" by defiling & polluting his holy Temple; & thereby grieving and forcing him to depart from us.

And surely, when we look upon our Sins in this View, we cannot help being deeply sensible of the Greatness of our Guilt, and abundantly convinced of the exceeding Malignity and Odiousness of it.

The Creatures below us, do all of them carefully observe the Laws of their Nature; and do, by a regular and uniform Course of Existence, all of them jointly conspire to show-forth, and proclaim their Maker's Praise. And (as the Psalmist speaks) "the

Heavens

Heavens

"Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Work."

Therefore, while the whole Creation does thus, as it were, join in Concert, and by its silent Harmony and Order, evidently set forth the Praises of God: how exceedingly wicked and criminal must Man be, thus to rebel against his Almighty and Beneficent Creator, and against his merciful Saviour and Redeemer: who does, notwithstanding all his Ingratitude, not only uphold and support him with his Hand, here in this World: but likewise intercedes and pleads for him with his Father: and solicits him, wicked as he is, to return to his Duty and Allegiance, by the affectionate Calls, and gracious Applications of his Holy Spirit?

If we do but look upon our Sins in this Light, and suffer such Reflections as these to dwell long and duly upon our Minds, they cannot fail of exciting in us a deep and unfeigned Sense of our Guilt. For, as the greatest Happiness of all, is, not to sin, or offend wilfully; so the next to this, is, to be duly sensible of our Sins. — And,

The Reason of this Assertion is, that if this Sense of our Guilt is but duly attended to, it will not only effectually restrain us from returning to our former Sins: but will likewise powerfully incline us to

lead a new Life for the Time to come : and then more especially, when we add to it,

andly, The second thing mentioned as included in the Notion of true Repentance, [viz] A just and awful Apprehension of God's Displeasure.

As the Foundation of Repentance must necessarily be laid in a deep and unfeigned Sense of the Guilt of our past Sins; so must the Foundation of future Obedience be necessarily placed in the Fear of God, and in a just and awful Apprehension and Dread of his Displeasure. And accordingly we find that the Obedience of our first Parents was not only founded in the Consideration of God's Goodness to them, but likewise upon the Apprehension & Dread of his Displeasure, in Case of their Disobedience. And agreeably hereto, the Fear of God is everywhere, both in the Old and the New Testament, proposed to Men, as one of the principal Motives to Obedience : and the Vices and Impieties of Men are as constantly ascribed to the Absence and the Want of this religious Fear and Dread.

Thus Abraham says of the Inhabitants of Gerar, "Surely the FEAR of God is not in this Place; and they will slay me for my Wife's Sake." And God himself said to Abraham, when he offered up his Son; "Now I know that thou FEAREST God, see-

"ing

"ing thou hast not withheld thy Son, I thine only Son from me." — Thus Jacob is said to "swear by the FEAR of his Father Isaac." — Joseph says, "This do and live: for I FEAR God." — And Moses says to the Children of Israel, upon the giving of the Law in Mount Sinai, with the awful Solemnity of an Earthquake, & of Thunder and Lightning, that then appeared with it, "God is come to prove you, and that his FEAR may be before your Faces, that ye sin not." — And elsewhere God himself says, "O that there were such a Heart in them that they would FEAR me, and keep my Commandments always."

Well therefore does holy David say, "the FEAR of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom." And to the same Purpose Solomon, "the FEAR of the Lord is the Beginning of Knowledge." — As also in innumerable other Passages, both in the Law and the Prophets, "Sanctify, therefore, the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your FEAR, and let him be your Dread."

In the New Testament our Blessed Saviour directs his Disciples, to "FEAR him which is able to destroy both Body and Soul in Hell." — And his Apostles, in like Manner, direct their Converts to "FEAR God;" — to "perfect Holiness in the FEAR of God;" and to "work out their Salvation with FEAR and

"Trembling;" - to "serve God acceptably with Reverence and godly FEAR;" - and to "pass the Time of their Sojourning here in FEAR." &c.

Thus, from the Whole, it is easy to observe, that as the Fear of God is so essentially necessary, to enforce and secure our Obedience to his Laws, it follows from hence, that a just and awful Apprehension and Dread of God's Displeasure must likewise necessarily be One of the principal Ingredients of a sincere and true Repentance. For which Reason it hath been very rightly said, that where there is no FEAR of God; there cannot, for that Reason, be any Amendment; & where there is no Amendment, all Repentance is necessarily vain. — But,

Where Men are duly sensible of their Guilt, and thoroughly convinced and persuaded of the exceeding Malignity of Sin, they will naturally be led to entertain a just & awful Apprehension of the Dread of the divine Displeasure upon this Account.

When the guilty Sinner looks carefully into his own Breast, and there reads the black Catalogue of his Sins, and seriously considers all the heightening Circumstances, and Aggravations of them; - when he considers the infinite Dignity & Majesty of that God, whom he has offended; - when he reflects upon that transcendant Purity and Holiness, which he

has

has grieved, and displeased; when he thinks upon that inflexible and tremendous Justice, which he has incensed and provoked; and when he takes into his Account, that stupendous Mercy and Goodness which he has so long and so shamefully despised and abused; he must needs be seized with the utmost Horror and Dread of the divine Displeasure, which he has brought upon himself; and his Heart must even MELT within him, and his Spirit faint, and his Knees smite together, "like the impious BELSHAZZAR, when he saw the Hand-writing upon the Wall against him."

When he considers, that he has forfeited and lost the Favour & Friendship of the greatest and best of Beings; - that he has by his Sins "crucified afresh" the Lord of Glory, and even made his Saviour and Redeemer to become his Enemy; - and that he has grieved the holy Spirit of God, and forced him to depart from him, he must needs be filled with Remorse and Anguish; and when he considers farther, that dreadful Penalty which he has incurred by his Sins; - when he looks forward into the next World, with Horror and Dread, and sees an offended and angry God almost ready to pronounce Sentence, and to execute Vengeance upon him; and below, Hell ready to receive him, and moving herself at

this coming : whilst he is thus distressed, and perplexed ; and walks over the frightful Precipice of Eternity, trembling every Step he goes ; and fearing every Moment, lest he should fall into this bottomless Pit of Destruction : whilst " the Terrors of God do thus set themselves in Array against him " he must needs be overwhelmed with the Consciousness of his Guilt ; and be thoroughly possessed with an Apprehension and Dread of God's Displeasure : which, if not timely averted, must soon plunge him into eternal Misery and Torment.

This, it must be owned, is a terrible Case : but still where there is this Sense & Apprehension left, there are notwithstanding some Hopes. This is at least a favourable Symptom ; and a sure Sign and Indication, that the Part affected is not as yet quite corrupted : but may still, (provided only that due Care be taken, and no Time lost,) by Degrees be restored to its former Strength and Soundness.

For although the Denunciations of God's Wrath, against obdurate and impenitent Sinners, be indeed exceedingly severe, yet there is, thro' his Love and Mercies in Christ, this Comfort and Consolation left, that the Gospel affords all possible Encouragement to sincere Penitents (*), to come unto God,

by
 and (*) *Nunquam sera est ad bonos Mores Via. — Sero, sed sero.*

My Father in Christ; who has graciously invited all such as "We weary, and heavy laden," with the Burden of their Sins; to come unto him by Faith and Repentance: and "He will give them Rest" unto their Souls.

If therefore, to the Sense of his Guilt, and to an awful Apprehension & Dread of God's Displeasure, the humble Penitent does but add,

3dly, A godly Sorrow and Contrition of Heart, for having incurred and provoked it; he does at least so far, repent sincerely, and as he ought to do.

And indeed, when he is once duly convinced of the exceeding Malignity of Sin; and is, in Consequence of it, filled with a just and awful Apprehension and Dread of the Divine Displeasure, upon this Account, he must needs be pierced with the most lively Sorrow; and feel the bitterest Remorse, and Anguish of Soul, for his past Sins. When he considers, how grievously he has provoked the Majesty of Heaven; - what ungrateful Returns he has made to God, for all his wonderful Love and Goodness towards him; how he has "crucified the Blessed Jesus again by his Sins; & grieved the holy Spirit of God;" when he considers that terrible Condition into which his Sins have brought him, & that dreadful Punishment which hangs over his Head;

when he considers all this seriously, he will, with the Psalmist, not only "confess his Wickedness," but he will likewise be truly "sorry for his Sin."

"And according as his Sins have been either more or less in Number, or more or less grievous in their Nature; or else continued in either a longer or a shorter Time; even so will his Sorrow, and Grief for them, be either greater or less in Proportion."

Thus we find, that St. Peter, who had denied his Master, and that too with the dreadful Aggravation of profane cursing and swearing, "went out, and wept bitterly." His Concern for his Sin was too great to be confined; too much to be expressed by a Sigh, or a Groan, or a sorrowful Countenance: "he went out," (i.e. he went apart by himself,) and (in Consideration of his Sin,) "wept bitterly."

If therefore we would repent, as we ought to do; our Sorrow, and our Grief must keep pace with our Guilt; and the former must be as great, and as lasting, as the latter is heinous, and provoking. If our Sins have been great and manifold, our Sorrow for them must be great in Proportion, and lasting in Duration. For great and heinous Offences, confirmed Habits of Sin, and a long Course of Impiety and Irreligion, do necessarily require a deep and sincere Humiliation of the Soul before God; and a

long, and lasting Sorrow for them; and although we pray, and hope, and believe, and are assured, that God will freely and graciously pardon, all our Sins, for the Sake of Christ, upon our sincere Repentance and Amendment; yet we must take especial Care, that we do not too easily forgive ourselves. If we would sorrow after a godly Manner, our Sorrow must not proceed only from a Sense of the Danger we are in; but from a sincere Love of God, and a Sense of his wonderful Goodness & Love to us.

There is indeed a Sorrow, which proceeds only from an Apprehension of the imminent Danger, to which our Sins have unhappily exposed us. But alas! this is no more than a thin Vapour that appeareth but for a little Time, and then vanisheth away. A Man that lives under the Influence of vicious Habits; may, it is possible, at the seeming Approach of Death; or when the Hand of God is heavy upon him, appear to be truly penitent for his Sins: he may express a great Concern for his past Behaviour; and promise solemnly to live better, and to become a New Man; if he can but escape this Sickness, or this Calamity: but, at best, this is no more than the natural Workings of Self-preservation. It is natural for all Men to desire Happiness; although they are often mistaken in the

Use of the Means, which are necessary in Order to procure it: & it is likewise equally natural, to shun and fly from every thing which has the Air and Appearance of Misery. Therefore, when Men start at the seeming Approach of Death; and show an Abhorrence for those Courses which have brought them almost to the very Brink of Destruction; they only do what Nature itself prompts them to, and what they cannot possibly avoid. For, who is that Man, who would not, (if possible,) speedily avoid a Danger that was ready to fall upon him?

It is therefore greatly to be feared, that if the Danger were but once removed, such Persons would (like Pharaoh) soon harden their Hearts, and return to their old Sins, like "the Dog to his Vomit," & like "the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire."

Nothing is more common than to see Men, upon the Bed of Sickness, greatly bewailing and lamenting the Folly and Wickedness of their past Lives; and full of Resolutions to lead a new Life, if God would be but pleased, to restore them again to their former Health. If God would but graciously do this, how thankful, and how good would they be? But how much soever in earnest they may seem for the Time; it is sorely against the Grain, and only

because they cannot help it. For as soon as ever the Danger is past, they do, like the frightened Manner when the Tempest is over, soon forget all their good Resolutions, and solemn Vows; and instead of being the better for them, they do on the contrary become more hardened, & rather "strengthen themselves in their Wickedness." Not considering, and "not knowing that the Goodness of God ought rather to lead them to Repentance," than to encourage them to continue in their Sins. (X)

This Sorrow therefore, as it is naturally of such a short Continuance, cannot possibly produce any good Effects: And, for this Reason, cannot possibly be acceptable in the Sight of God. This is that "Sorrow of the World; which, (as the Apostle says,) worketh Death." But a true "godly Sorrow, which worketh Repentance to Salvation, not to be repented of," must proceed from deep and unfeigned Sense of our Guilt, and a just and awful Apprehension, and Dread of the divine Displeasure. It must not only arise from a Sense of our Danger, but it must likewise have a Respect unto God, to the Honour and Authority of his Laws, and to the Passion and Depth of our Blessed Saviour's, which our Sins were wholly the Cause of; and also to the Glory of his Name, and the Interests of his Religion.

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which

(*) It is of great Importance to know the Difference between legal and evangelical Repentance, that we may not deceive ourselves. A legal Repentance flows merely from a Sense of Danger, and a Fear of God's Wrath; but that which is evangelical is the Effect of saving Faith, and is attended with true Mourning for Sin. A legal Repentance only regards restraining from *some* Sins, but the other is attended with the Hatred of *all* Sin; the former is attended with Striving to amend our Lives in our own Strength, the latter with an entire Dependence upon Christ in the Use of the Means. Legal Repentance chiefly regards the Punishment, and is

[under]

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which have been so grossly injured by our Sins. And therefore it must be such a Sorrow and Contrition of Heart, as begets in us,

4thly, A thorough Hatred and Detestation of our Sins. — For,

Then only can we be truly said to repent, when our Sins become, as displeasing to us, as they were once agreeable; when our Opinions and Sentiments of them are perfectly different from what they were before; when we hate and abhor those Practices which once we looked upon with Complacency and Satisfaction; and when the Remembrance of them serves only to work us up to a holy Indignation and Displeasure against them, and against ourselves, for having heretofore been guilty of them.

This is that godly Sorrow, and pious Resentment for our past Sins, which St. Paul describes in these Words; "Behold, what Carefulness, it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what Indignation, yea, what Fear, yea, what vehement Desire, yea, what Zeal, yea, what Revenge?"

If we are but truly and deeply sensible of the great Malignity and Heinousness of our past Sins, and justly apprehensive of God's Displeasure for them, & if we are likewise heartily sorry for having offended him, we cannot choose but have an Abhorrence

horreace and Aversion for them. — If we have a true Regard for God and Religion, we must naturally hate all such Practices as are displeasing to him, and injurious to his Honour and Glory. And if we would be thoroughly reconciled to him, and re-instated in his Favour, we must love every thing that God loves, & hate every thing that God hates; and consequently, we must hate and abhor our Sins from our very Hearts, because, without this God cannot be reconciled unto us; neither can we possibly be qualified for his Favour.

For unless we do from our Hearts detest and abhor them, we cannot possibly leave and forsake them. No Man ever yet willingly left and forsook that which he continued to love. So long as we retain any Degree of Liking for them, we shall be too much inclined to return unto them. — And surely, When we reflect duly upon the excessive Turpitude of Sin, & the dreadful Consequences to which it exposes us, and what a terrible & fearful thing it is to fall into the Hands of the living God; it is impossible, but we must sincerely abhor those Sins which have rendered us obnoxious to his Displeasure, and to all the severe Effects of his wrathful Indignation. Therefore, if we do but seriously consider the fatal Tendency of Sin, and the destructive

Nature of it, we must conceive the most unfeigned Aversion and Abhorrence for all such Ways as lead down to Death and Destruction. And, for this Reason, we shall be naturally inclined to complete and perfect our Repentance, fifthly, By forming such a sincere and steadfast Resolution of Amendment as will, through God's Grace seconding our earnest & faithful Endeavours, actually produce and "bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance." "Repent, and be converted."

This Resolution is the necessary Result of the foregoing Branches of true Repentance. For whoever is duly sensible of his Guilt, - justly apprehensive of God's Displeasure, and heartily sorry for having incurred and provoked it; and does, in Consequence thereof, hate and abhor his past Sins upon this Account, must necessarily form such a sincere and steadfast Resolution of Amendment, as will probably, through God's Grace upon his Endeavours, actually "bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance."

No Man, that thinks at all, can possibly be reconciled to the dreadful Thought of his being finally and eternally miserable; and, for this Reason, every Sinner that seriously considers the fatal Tendency of his sinful Ways, if he proceeds only so far as we have hitherto gone in the Consideration of

this Subject, and if he passes regularly and carefully through all the several Stages before-mentioned, he must necessarily, in the last Place, firmly and resolutely resolve upon a new Course of Life for the Time to come. He can never think of going on in the same Way, contrary to the impartial Judgment of his own Mind, the clearest and most forcible Conviction of his Understanding, the strong and powerful Remonstrances of his Conscience, the express Commands of God in Scripture, and the awful and interesting Motives of the Gospel: and this, at the Expence of all his Ease and Quiet here in this World, and with the infinite Risque and Hazard of his eternal Salvation in the next. But, on the contrary, whilst his wounded Soul, is thus full of the Sense of his Guilt, with the Apprehension & Dread of God's Displeasure, & even overflows with Tears, and other Expressions of Sorrow, upon these Accounts, and does most sincerely hate and detest its former Sins, he must necessarily form a sincere and steadfast Resolution of Amendment for the Time to come. He will naturally say, with the Prodigal in the Gospel, "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son;" and he will likewise firmly

resolve to be dutiful and obedient for the Time to come.

This is what every sincere Penitent does, & must do, if he hopes that his Repentance will be accepted of God. Therefore, a faint Resolution of Amendment will by no Means serve our turn: but we must resolve in good Earnest to break-off our Sins, and never more return unto them: and we must be sure to put our Resolutions into Practice, that so our Repentance may never need to be repented of. Unless we do this, it is all but lost Labour, and will be of no Account in the Sight of God. For, (as the wise Son of Sirach says,) "He that washeth himself after the touching of a DEAD Body, if he touch it again, what availeth his Washing? So is it with a Man that fasteth for his Sins, & goeth again, and doeth the same: who will hear his Prayer? or what doth his Humbling profit him?"

For which Reason, our Resolution of Amendment must be sincere and steadfast; it must be such as will stand the Trial of Temptation, such as may, by the Help of God's Grace, be able to withstand the Assaults of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. We must before-hand expect to have the Sincerity of our Resolution brought to the Test. Well, therefore, did the Son of Sirach advise, "my Son, if thou

come to serve the Lord, prepare thy Soul for Temptation." We ought then to prepare ourselves accordingly, and to "put on the whole Armour of God; that so we may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil; and having done all, to stand."

And, — That our Endeavours may prove effectual, we must pray to God to assist and to strengthen us; that so his "Grace may be sufficient for us, and his Strength made perfect in our Weakness." And, when we are actually under Circumstances of Temptation, we must look up stedfastly unto Heaven with the Eye of Faith; we must call to mind all the Promises and Threatenings of the Gospel, all the Glories and the Joys of Heaven, and all the Miseries and the Torments of Hell. And, for our farther Encouragement to persevere in our Duty, let us set before us the glorious Examples of those noble Worthies who have gone before us in the same Paths of Virtue and Goodness; of those many Saints, and Martyrs, who have, before us, "fought the same good Fight, who have finished their Course, and kept the Faith;" & who are now entered upon the Reward of their faithful Services, "into the Presence of God, where there is Fullness of Joy; & at his Right-Hand, where there are Pleasures for evermore."

If we are, in this Manner, enabled to resist and overcome Temptations, and to conquer and subdue our Sins; and if we do, by a regular and uniform Course of Obedience to all God's Laws, without Exception or Reserve, manifest the Sincerity and Firmness of our Resolution; if we do, upon all Occasions, "bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance," if we "Repent, and be converted," and shew-forth the Praises of God in our Lives and Conversations; then is our Repentance sincere, and acceptable in the Sight of God; for the Sake, and through the Merits and Mediation, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Sermon

the Guilt of our past Sins. And therefore, as we have it not in our Power to atone for the

SERMON —

divine Justice, for the Corruption of our Nature, the Sins of our Lives; and as we are by Reason of the great Mercy and Humanity of our present State, utterly incapable of a Return and unguining Obedience; therefore God has in great Mercy and Love, and in great Pity and Compassion to our present Weakness, graciously condescended to provide this

The Power and Efficacy

of Repentance.

Acts iii. 19. "Repent, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out."

Having already, from these Words, established the great Doctrine and Duty of Repentance; and also explained the Nature of it: I am now,

III. To show the Power and Efficacy of it, "**Repent, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out.**"

When we speak of the Power and Efficacy of true Repentance, we do not mean, that it has in itself any Degree of Causality or Efficiency to our Justification with God. True Repentance, which always includes Amendment of Life, may, in some Sort, serve to indemnify our future Conduct; but it can in no Ways, and by no Means atone for and expiate

the Guilt of our PAST Sins. And therefore, as we have it not in our Power to make Satisfaction to the divine Justice, for the Corruption of our Nature, the Sins of our Lives, and as we are, by Reason of the great Frailty and Infirmity of our present State, utterly incapable of a Perfect and unflinching Obedience; therefore God has in great Mercy and Love, and in great Pity and Compassion to our present Weakness, graciously condescended to provide this Satisfaction himself, and to admit us into a second Covenant, upon such Terms as are suited to the present Condition of our Nature, and that Degree of Strength which we now enjoy. Thus it is that we are "justified freely by God's Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation, through Faith in his Blood."

These Terms are, (as St Paul expresses it,) "Repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Or else, such a Faith in the Merits of Christ, and such a Belief of the Doctrines which he delivered, as does by the Operation of God's Spirit upon our Hearts actually produce in us sincere Repentance for our past Sins, and unfeigned Obedience for the Time to come: (i.e) good Christians have their past Sins forgiven; and the original

Ground

Ground or Motive of that Forgiveness, is the eternal and eternal Goodness of God; and the parabolical Method, in which the Goodness of God has thought fit to manifest itself in this Forgiveness of Sin, is thro' the Intercession of Christ. The Duty of rational Creatures, who are made capable of discerning between Good and Evil, is to obey at all Times the Commands of God. And whensoever they knowingly & presumptuously transgress against the Light he has given them, the natural and just Punishment of Transgression is Death. Even upon innocent Beings, who may be supposed never to have transgressed at all, God is under no Obligation to bestow Immortality. For He who has Power over all, may, without Wrong to Any, do what he pleases with his own; and That Life, which to all the intelligent Beings in the Universe is originally his Free Gift, he may freely continue to any of them for what Portion of Time he pleases; and when their appointed Period is run out, and they have enjoyed the Effects of his bountiful Goodness in their proper Share of Being, he may, even without Consideration of Sin, again as freely take it away. Much more, when rational Beings have rebelled against him, by presumptuously transgressing the Laws of everlasting Righteousness, may he justly cut them

short in Displeasure, and by an exemplary Sentence of righteous Judgment, inflict upon them the Punishment of Death. For, what our Saviour declares in a particular Case, that God could easily, if he pleased, destroy the whole Nation of the impenitent Jews, and "raise up, even out of the Stones of the Street, Children unto Abraham;" is no less true universally, that God can at any Time destroy, with exemplary Judgments, any disobedient Creatures, and create to himself Others, with the same Ease as he did Them at first, to undergo a new Probation of Obedience. Nevertheless, from the Consideration of the divine Goodness, they who have formerly been disobedient, and are now convinced of the Unreasonableness of being so, and are sincerely resolved to do what is Right for the future; find a reasonable Ground and Foundation of Hope, that God, in his great Forbearance, will still make a further Trial of Them, and accept instead of Innocence, their sincere Amendment. And This, which, in the Arguments of Nature, is BUT Hope; is, in the Declarations of the Gospel, an assured Promise; that if a Sinner forsakes his unrighteous Ways, and does for the Future That which is lawful and right, he shall save his Soul alive.

The original Ground or Motive of this Forgiveness,

ness,

being in the essential Goodness of God. For He who has Power over all, may remit as much of his own Right as he pleases; & This, upon what Terms and Conditions He himself alone, who is under no Controul, shall in his own divine Wisdom think fit to appoint and to accept. For if, even in human Judicatures, a Judge is not to condemn, or to acquit, according to the Affections or Expectations of the Spectators, but according to his own more perfect Knowledge of the Law and of the Fact, much more is it reasonable that God, whose Judgment is unerring, and his Knowledge infallible, should "have Mercy on whom He will have Mercy, and Compassion," not arbitrarily, but "on whom He" himself sees it fit to "have Compassion."

By original Right therefore, God may appoint what Terms of Forgiveness He pleases. In Fact, the Method wherein the divine Goodness has thought fit actually to manifest itself in the Forgiveness of Sin, is thro' the Intercession of Christ. "God, for Christ's Sake, has forgiven you." Not that God, who, by the essential Rectitude of his Nature, acts always according to perfect Right and Reason, can be any Way changed, or have any Affection moved in him, by the Interposition of any Intercessor whatever: But that, being "of purer Eyes than to be-

"hold Iniquity," and intending to show the greatest possible Discountenance to Sin. He would not, in Wisdom, accept of any lesser Satisfaction than the Sufferings and Death of his Son, for our Sins; and, in Consequence of it, his Mediation for us before him, continually.

The Words, just cited, which we render, "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you;" are in the Original more accurate and expressive, "God hath forgiven you In Christ;" (i.e.) he has in the Dispensation and by the Terms of the Gospel of Christ, declared his Acceptance of your Repentance. From This Consideration, it is easy to give a satisfactory Answer to the principal and most material Objection of Unbelievers; who, in Opposition to the Great Doctrine of the Gospel, alledge, that God being always necessarily Omnipresent, and consequently himself at all Times ready to hear the Prayers of all Men, therefore there could be no need of appointing any Mediator; and that God being of himself, essentially in his Nature, always disposed, to do what is right and fit, therefore his Purposes can no Way be changed by the Interposition of any Intercessor.

To this Objection, it is easy, from what has been said, to give a just and sufficient Answer; For the

End

End and Design of this Mediation of Christ between God and Man, was not, that God might be prevailed upon, as Men are, by Persuasion, to do what otherwise he would not have thought right to be done: But the Design of it was, that God would satisfy his Hatred and Indignation against Sin, by consigning the Pardon of it thro' the Blood of the Mediator. From hence also it appears, that as on the one Hand, the Intercession of Christ is not at all of the less Value, because the eternal and essential Goodness of God was the original Ground or Motive of our obtaining Forgiveness thro' That Intercession; so neither on the other Hand is the Goodness of God less to be acknowledged, on the Pardon of Sin less ~~great~~, because the Method in which God was pleased to manifest this free Goodness, was thro' the Intercession of Christ. For he, who, in voluntary Compliance with his Father's good Pleasure, laid down his Life for the Redemption and Salvation of Men; did himself love us, and gave himself for us, a Ransom and Propitiation for Sin. And at

And, agreeably hereto, when St. Peter opened his Commission on the Day of Pentecost, and, (both in the Text, & in the Chapter before it,) preached unto the Jews that same Jesus, whom they had taken, & by wicked Hands had crucified & slain;

"hold Iniquity," and intending to show the greatest possible Discountenance to Sin. He would not, in Wisdom, accept of any lesser Satisfaction than the Sufferings and Death of his Son, for our Sins; and, in Consequence of it, his Mediation for us before him, continually.

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the same Time, He, who having Power over all, was pleased to appoint and to accept on our Behalf this Intercession of his Son; may with as much Truth be affirmed to have forgiven us FREELY, of his own Grace and Goodness, as if he had done it without any Intercession at all. The Scripture always expresses this Matter accurately, with great and exact Distinctness, and with high Acknowledgment of the original and essential Goodness of the God and Father of all. Our Saviour himself says, "God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life." And the Apostle in like Manner, "In This, (says he,) was manifested the Love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the World, that we might live thro' Him."

There is then, by these Means, under the Gospel, an inseparable Connexion established between Faith and Repentance, on the, &c. (under) —

— on the one hand, and the Remission of Sins and eternal Life, on the other. And although Repentance be frequently spoken of by itself, as a thing that will entitle us to Pardon and Salvation, yet it must always be understood to be such a Repentance as is founded upon Gospel-Motives, and actually proceeds from Faith in Christ; which is the only thing that can make it acceptable in the Sight of God.

This was the almost constant Doctrine of John the Baptist, who is followed by the Disciples of our Lord, & by Christ himself, who has joined together, and that inseparably, Repentance and Remission of Sins in his Name, in that Commission which he gave to his Apostles, after his Resurrection, in these Words: "And he said unto them, thus it is written; and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third Day: and that Repentance and Remission of Sins should be preached in his Name, among all Nations."

And, agreeably hereto, when St. Peter opened his Commission on the Day of Pentecost, and, (both in the Text, & in the Chapter before it,) preached unto the Jews that same Jesus, whom they had taken, & by wicked Hands had crucified & slain,

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the Historian tells us, that, "when they heard this, they were pricked in their Hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" Their Consciences, now awakened & alarmed, severely upbraided them with the Guilt they had contracted, by wilfully "crucifying the Lord of Glory," and the Sense of it was so very insupportable that it almost occasioned in them Madness and Despair. And surely, if ever there was need of a healing Balm, to be poured into the Wounds of a guilty Conscience, these Men, of all others that ever lived, or ever shall live, stood most in need of such a sovereign Remedy. And yet, dangerous and desperate as their Condition was, & seemingly without Hope, as they themselves thought it, yet was not utterly past Cure. For "the things that are impossible with Men, are yet possible with God," "to whom belong Mercies and Forgivenesses tho' we have rebelled against him;" who is "a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and of great Kindness," "keeping Mercy for thousands, forgiving Iniquity and Transgression and Sin."

For this Reason, although the Sin of those who crucified our Saviour was exceeding great, yet it was not too great for God to forgive; for the Sake of

Christ.

Christ. The infinite Merit of his Passion and Death was sufficient to outweigh all the Guilt of the whole World. "The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all Sin," Indeed, our blessed Saviour himself particularly designed, and earnestly desired, that these very Persons themselves should fully partake of the Benefits of his Death, if they would but seek earnestly for it, by exercising true Repentance towards God, and an humble Faith and Trust in him. And to this End, even in his last Agony on the Cross, he prayed for his Crucifiers, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." And for this Reason St. Peter, perfectly well knowing the Mind & Disposition of his Master, and the Nature of that Commission which he was intrusted with, plainly declares to these repenting Jews, not only the Possibility, but likewise the infallible Certainty of their obtaining Pardon, if they would only seek for it in that Way which the Blessed Jesus himself had graciously appointed: [viz] by "Repentance towards God, and Faith in him." "Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized every One of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the Remission of Sins, and ye shall receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost."

In this Manner were all their Sins to be freely and fully pardoned for the Sake of Christ: and ac-

Accordingly the Historian tells us, that "all they that gladly received his Word were baptised; and the same Day there were added unto them about three thousand Souls."

So effectual was the earnest Intercession of our kind and merciful Saviour in the Behalf of his greatest Enemies! — Therefore,

If "these Sinners against their own Souls" were freely pardoned for the Sake of Christ, upon their Repentance, & their Faith in him, let no Man, who sincerely repents, and amends his Life, ever despair of being pardoned by God, altho' his Sins be never so many, and never so grievous, and never so long continued in. God always knows how to pardon, if we do but turn unto him with all our Hearts, and come unto him by Faith in Christ. Our Lord himself has declared it, "him that cometh to me, will I in no wise cast out." — And,

To assure us of the Truth of this, it was that our Lord delivered the Parable of the lost Sheep; in the Conclusion of which he declares, that "Joy shall be in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just Persons that need no Repentance." — And,

As if this was not sufficient to encourage returning Sinners to come unto God, by Faith and Repentance,

penance, he invites them still further by the Parable of the Piece of Silver; & assures them a second Time, that "there is Joy in the Presence of the Angels of God over one Sinner that repenteth." But, as if a Doctrine of this Importance could never be too much inculcated, and too powerfully recommended, our Lord does, in the Parable of the prodigal Son, clearly set forth, and that in the most pathetic and affecting Manner, God's great Readiness to receive and to pardon returning Sinners. There in God is, under the Character of the Father, represented as melting into Compassion and Forgiveness, upon the first Discovery of his Son's Return. For, "when the Son was yet a great Way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him." And even before the Prodigal could possibly confess his Fault, and sue for Pardon, the tender Father had already sealed it, and buried all that was past in Oblivion. And when the Son nevertheless still proceeded to confess his Fault, and express his Concern for what was past, his Father, as it were, desirous to spare him that Confusion of Face which was unavoidable to a Person of an ingenuous Temper in his Circumstances, seems, as it were, unwilling even to hear his Confession, and as if he had rather let the whole

Matter pass over in Silence. — His Son was now sensible of his Fault, and returned to his Duty; and the good Father desired no more. And therefore, to convince his Son in the strongest Manner that he heartily forgave him all that was past, he “said to his Servants,” (as if he thought nothing too good for him, and no Expressions and Marks of his Love and of his Joy, upon such an Occasion, too great & too many,) “bring-forth the best Robe and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shoes on his Feet. And bring hither the fatted Calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my Son was dead, & is alive again; was lost, and is found.”

And, — If we consider the Occasion upon which these Parables were delivered, we shall be farther convinced of God’s great Readiness to pardon all returning Sinners. For the Evangelist tells us, that it was upon One of those Occasions when “the Publicans and Sinners drew near unto him for to hear him.” Upon which “the Scribes and Pharisees murmured at him, saying, this Man receiveth Sinners and eateth with them.” Upon this our Lord delivered those three Parables already mentioned.

“They thought wickedly, that God was even such an One as themselves;” intollerably rigid, severe, and inexorable: but our Blessed Lord “repro-

ved them, and set before them the great Folly & Wickedness of their Judgment: by showing them, that whenever "the Wicked forsakes his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, & returns unto the Lord, he will have Mercy upon him, & abundantly pardon him."

By this our Lord plainly showed them, that "God's Thoughts were not as their Thoughts, nor his Ways as their Ways. For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so were his Ways higher than their Ways, and his Thoughts than their Thoughts."

The Prophet Isaiah had foretold of the Messiah, that "he should not bruise the broken Reed, nor quench the smoking Flax;" but that he should, on the contrary, "bind up the broken-hearted, and comfort all that mourn; and that he should revive the Spirit of the humble, and revive the Heart of the contrite Ones."

And accordingly our Lord gave them to understand, (as he expressly declared upon another Occasion,) that he came on Purpose "to seek and to save that which was lost." And in like Manner we find, that the chief substance of the Apostles' preaching every where, (as St. Paul expressly declares his own Doctrine to have been,) was "Repentance

toward God, and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."v
 And every where in the Old Testament, there is
 the greatest Encouragement given to penitent Sin-
 ners, as appears plainly in the Case of David, of
 Ahab, of the People of Nineveh; but more parti-
 cularly still in the whole Body of the Jewish Na-
 tion; who, although they were often "led into
 Captivity for their Sins, yet as often as ever they re-
 turned again unto the Lord their God, and sought
 him, and obeyed his Voice, according to all that he
 commanded them, then the Lord their God turned
 their Captivity, and had Compassion upon them,
 and returned and gathered them from all the Na-
 tions whither the Lord their God had scattered
 them." — And again,

By the Mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel, God does
 expressly declare, that "when the wicked Man
 turneth away from his Wickedness that he hath
 committed, and doth that which is lawful & right,
 he shall save his Soul alive. Because he considereth,
 and turneth away from all his Transgressions that
 he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall
 not die." — And,

As if our gracious God could not give too great
 Encouragement to Repentance, and too strong As-
 surances of his Readiness to pardon, he says thus by

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the same Prophet; "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but rather that he should turn from his Way, and live."

Neither was it under the Law only that God discovered a Readiness to forgive those, upon their Repentance, who had broken his Covenant; for, although most of those Invitations to Repentance, which we meet with in the New Testament, are indeed to be understood of the first Conversion of Men to Christianity, yet it must be granted, that even those who had been so unhappy as to fall into great and crying Sins, after their Baptism, were still invited and exhorted to repent of their Sins, and had all possible Encouragement given them so to do.

This is abundantly plain and clear from the Case of the incestuous Corinthian, who was "delivered unto Satan for the Destruction of the Flesh, that his Spirit might be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus."

It appears likewise from the Case of those other Corinthian Converts, who had profaned and abused the holy Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, and who were expressly said to have been punished with Sickness and Death here in this World, that so they might be saved in that which is to come; that being

thus "judged, & chastened of the Lord, we should not be condemned with the World."

This appears still further from the Message sent by St. John to the seven Churches of Asia; who are exhorted to "repent, and do the first Works;" and that under this express Penalty of having their Candlestick, (i.e) the Light of the Gospel, removed from among them.

It is not to be conceived, that God's Mercies should be more straitened and confined, under the Gospel, than they were under the former Covenant, the Law of Moses. But as the Christian Economy is, from first to last, a Dispensation of Mercy, they must be rather increased and enlarged. God is "the same Yesterday, To-day, & For-ever." "He is the Lord, he changes not:" therefore alone it is that "we are not consumed" in our Iniquities, but have Time and Opportunity graciously afforded us to repent of our Sins, and to return unto our Duty.

And accordingly the earliest Fathers of the Christian Church speak, in very high Terms, of the great Power & Efficacy of Repentance, under the Gospel.

St. BARNABAS, the Companion of St. PAUL's Travails, says, that "When our Blessed Saviour was about to send out Apostles to preach the Gospel, he sent them to those who were wicked beyond Com-
parison,

passion, that he might make it appear to all the World, that "He did not come to call the Righteous, but Sinners to Repentance."

And St. CLEMENT, Bishop of Rome, says thus, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: "Let us look stedfastly to the Blood of Christ, and consider how precious it is in the Sight of God. For this Blood which was shed, in Order to our Salvation, has purchased the Grace of Repentance to ALL the World. Let us look back to the Generations of Old, and we shall find that, in every Age of the World, the Lord has graciously allowed Place for Repentance to all those that were willing to turn unto him: NOAH preached Repentance, and all that obeyed the Call were saved. JONAH threatened Destruction to the Ninevites; but when they repented of their Sins, & addressed God, by Prayer, he was appeased; and although they were before Strangers to the true God, yet were they made Partakers of his Salvation."

And the same Holy Person, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, says thus: "Let us repent, as long as we continue here, in this World; for we are as Clay in the Hands of the Artificer; for as the Potter fashions any Vessel a-new which happens to be misshapen or broken in the making, but never at-

tempts to rectify any Blemish in it after it is once burnt; even so, and in like Manner, let us, so long as we are suffered to continue in this World, truly, and from our Hearts, repent of those Sins we have been guilty of, that so we may obtain Pardon of the Lord whilst there is Time left us for Repentance; because, after we are gone out of this World, we shall not be any longer able either to confess, or to repent of our Sins."

And the learned OXORN, who flourished near the middle of the third Century, says, that "All Men who, by Reason of their sinful Nature, "labour and are heavy laden" with the Burden of their Sins, are invited by the Son of God, & called to his spiritual "Rest;" because God hath now "sent his Word," (i.e.) his Son, "and healed them; and they were saved from their Destruction;" (i.e.) they are now, by him, delivered from the Corruption of their sinful Nature, and from all the unhappy Effects of it. For, (says he,) "When a Sinner is deeply sensible of his Sins, and is hereby stirred up to Repentance, and when he humbles himself for his Sins in the Sight of God, then is he more acceptable in God's Sight than him who appears less sinful in the Eyes of Men; and who is so far from looking upon himself as a sinful Person, that he is, on the contrary,

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puffed up with the vain Conceits of his own Goodness." — And then he proceeds to confirm this Assertion, by the Instance of the Pharisee and the Publican, in the Gospel.

And St. CYPRIAN, about the Middle of the same Century, says thus: "When we are once gone out of this World, there is no longer any Place left for Repentance, no Room for Humiliation, nor any Benefit from it. Here alone can eternal Life be either secured or forfeited; here only can we provide for it by a lively Faith, and the Fruits of it, the true Worship and Service of God. Nor let any one be discouraged, by the Heinousness of his Sins, or his great Age, from endeavouring to obtain it. For true Repentance can never be too LATE, whilst we continue in this World. (*) The Door of Mercy is always open to all those that seek it; and there is free Access to all those that believe and rely on the Truth of God's Promises. And altho' it be in the very Close of Life, do you confess your Sins to the One only true God, and with Faith implore the Pardon of your Sins. For Pardon is always granted to him that confesseth his Sins in a proper Manner, & believeth in the Promises of the Gospel; whereby you may pass through the Gates of Death so im-

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mortal Life. This Privilege has Christ purchased for us; and, in his great Mercy, conferred upon us, by Means of his triumphing over Death, by his Cross; by redeeming every One that believeth on him, with the Price of his Blood; by reconciling him thereby to God the Father; and by renewing him to a spiritual Life, thro the Spirit of God at his Baptism." — Now,

Altho it must be granted, that St. CYPRIAN is here speaking of our FIRST Conversion to Christ at our Baptism, yet we may safely collect from hence, that true Repentance will always recommend us to God's Mercy in Christ, who will never cast-off any that turn to him with all their Hearts.

For the same holy Martyr, in his Discourse concerning those who had fallen away at the Time of Persecution, and renounced, and even blasphemed, their Lord and Saviour, addresses those very Apostates in these very affectionate and most pathetic Terms: "I beseech you, my Brethren, to submit yourselves to wholesome Counsels, and salutary Remedies; to joia your Tears with our Tears, & your Groans with our Groans, for you. We ourselves become Supplicants to you; that so we may be able to supplicate and entreat God in your Behalf; that so he may have Pity on you, and pardon your Sins.

Let them

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We beseech you to complete and to perfect your Repentance, and to satisfy your Sorrow for your past Sins, by suitable Marks and Expressions of Grief," — And then, after giving them some further Directions for their Conduct, he gives them this Encouragement in the Conclusion of his Discourse: "Whosoever shall humble himself in this Manner, before God, for his past Sins, whosoever shall, by his Repentance and Shame for his Offence, and by his Grief for his Apostacy, be stirred up to a higher Pitch of Virtue, and a greater Degree of Faith; such an One, I say, being now graciously heard by God, and strengthened & assisted by him, shall now make the Church rejoice on his Account, which was before made sorrowful by him, and he shall not only obtain Pardon for his past Sins, but shall likewise have a Crown of Glory."

And the Christian Cicerō, LACTANTIUS, who flourished in the Beginning of the fourth Century, says, "God desires greatly that all Men should be purified and cleansed from their Sins: & therefore, he commands all Men every where to repent." "Let no Man, (says he,) be disheartened, or despair of his Condition, when he is overcome of his Appetites and his Lusts, when he is either captivated by the Deceitfulness of Sin, or born down by the

Violence of Temptations; & in Consequence hereof falls into Sin. Because, he may still be delivered from this spiritual Bondage, and be again happily brought-back to the right Way, if he repents truly of his past Sins, and leads a new Life for the Time to come; and does thereby, in some Sort, make amends for the Wickedness of his former Life. For, if we believe our own Children to be reformed when we observe them to repent of their past Mis-carriages, and if we receive them again to Favour, and even cherish and embrace them, whom we had before cast-off and abandoned, why should we despair of the infinite Clemency and Mercy of our heavenly Father, when we repent, and turn unto him with all our Hearts? Because our merciful Lord and Father has graciously promised to forgive the Sins of all those that truly repent, and to blot out and to forget all the Iniquities of all those who lead a new Life for the Time to come."

Since then it appears, both from the Law & from the Prophets, and as well from the Old Testament as from the New, & likewise from the earliest Christian Church, that God is always ready and willing to pardon all sincere Penitents, and to receive them again to Mercy and to Favour, let not the Number of our Sins and the Greatness of our Guilt tempt a-

of us to despair of that "Mercy of God, which is
over all his Works." For he is "good and gra-
cious, & of great Mercy unto all that call upon him."
"He is full of Compassion and Mercy; long suffer-
ing, plentiful in Goodness & Truth." "For, look
how high the Heaven is in Comparison of the
Earth: so great is his Mercy also toward them that
fear him."

If therefore we do but truly and sincerely repent
of our past Sins, and lead a new Life for the Time
to come, we have no Room to doubt of God's Rea-
diness to pardon and forgive us. All the Doubt,
and all the Difficulty lies on our Side; but God is
always unchangeably the same. Thus He speaks
by the Prophet Malachi, "I am the Lord, I change
not: therefore ye Sons of Jacob are not consumed."
And again, "Return unto me, and I will return
unto you."

God is as much disposed to Pardon and Forgiveness
now as ever He was: and, if we repent sincerely,
we shall happily experience, that He is still the
same merciful and gracious God that ever He was.
It is our unspeakable Happiness that "He changes
not;" and for this Reason alone it is, that we "are
not all of us consumed in our Iniquities."

I shall conclude this Head with a very remark-
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able and most comfortable Passage from an ancient and eminent Prelate (*); who has left us an excellent Treatise on the Subject of Repentance.

“Let no One, (says he,) despair of the Mercy of God, when he reflects upon the Heinousness of any Crime he has been guilty of; not yet let any One presume so far upon it as to continue in Sin, in Hopes of it; but rather let the Confidence of him that hopes for Mercy lead him to true Repentance, without any Doubt or Distrust of it, that so the Humility of the Penitent may not plunge him into Despair: and let him so love and adore the Mercy of God, as to think of his Justice at the same Time with a becoming Awe. Let him hope, and be assured, that all his Sins will be forgiven upon true Repentance; but none of them pardoned, so long as he continues in them.”

I shall now Conclude with a suitable Exhortation to the Whole. — And here,

I shall observe, with the last mentioned Author, that we ought, above all things, to be firmly persuaded, that the Lord our God is both MERCIFUL and JUST. From hence it will appear, to whom it is that God forgives Sins; — WHERE he forgives them, — and WHEN he forgives them. The Knowledge of this will hinder us from entertaining

(*) St. Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe in Africa. V any

any unworthy Apprehensions of the Divine Nature, and likewise from delaying our Repentance.

As some People are so far blinded, as to attend only to the Consideration of the divine Justice, by fixing their Thoughts only upon the Mercy of God; by which Means they neglect and delay their Repentance, and vainly flatter themselves that they shall obtain Remission of their Sins, tho' they continue in them even to the End of their Lives.

For which Reason we ought to imprint carefully upon our Minds a deep Sense of God's inflexible Justice, and his unspotted Holiness; which will, with the Help of his Grace, effectually hinder us from presuming so far upon his Mercy, as to take Occasion from thence to continue in our Sins.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in our Sin, that Grace may abound? God forbid: How shall we that are dead to Sin, live any longer therein?" Therefore let us not presume to despise the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Longsuffering, because we know that the Goodness of God leadeth us to Repentance.

Let us not dare, then, after our Hardness and impenitent Hearts, to treasure up to ourselves Wrath, against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God; because He

will most certainly "render to every Man according to his Deeds."

God is merciful indeed; but then He is at the same Time inflexibly just, and transcendently pure, and holy, and good; and therefore, as God's Mercy will at all Times dispose him to pardon us upon our sincere Repentance and Amendment of Life, even so will his Justice and Holiness at all Times hinder him from pardoning our Sins so long as we continue in them. Upon our Repentance, he will fully pardon all our Sins; and readily forgive us all that is past: but without it, he will not, and cannot possibly pardon us. For, as the Prophet speaks, he is "of purer Eyes than to behold Evil, and cannot look on Iniquity." And holy David says, "Thou art the God that hast no Pleasure in Wickedness; neither shall any Evil dwell with thee: such as be foolish shall not stand in thy Sight; for Thou hatest all them that work Vanity." And Moses says, "All his Ways are Judgment." "He is a God of Truth, and without Iniquity; just and right is He." And Jehoshaphat says, "Let the Fear of the Lord be upon you, take heed and do it; for there is no Iniquity with the Lord our God; nor Respect of Persons, nor taking of Gifts." And Elihu, "Far be it from God that he should do Wickedness, and

from the Almighty that he should consider Inquiry;
for the Work of a Man shall he render unto him,
and cause every Man to find according to his Ways."

And St. Paul says expressly, that "We must all
appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that
every one may receive the things done in his Body,
according to that he hath done, whether it be good
or bad." And to the same Purpose, in many other
Places both of the Old and New Testament.

Since then God is just, as well as merciful, and
for this Reason, cannot possibly pardon Sin without
sincere Repentance and Amendment of Life, let us
not venture to put off this important Business, from
Day to Day, and from Time to Time, till it is past
Time; but let us seriously, and without Delay,
"Turn to the Lord" with all our Hearts, that so
He may turn unto us, and be merciful unto us, and
"love us freely," when his "Anger is turned away
from us." And therefore,

Let us only consider with ourselves what Hazard
we run, in putting-off and delaying this necessary
Duty. If we defer and neglect our Repentance now,
whatever the Reason of it be, the same Reason will
probably prevail upon us hereafter; and the longer
we live and go on in our Sins, the more we shall be
every Day settled in them; - the faster hold they

will take of us, and the less we shall be disposed to repent of, and to forsake them.

If we put-off our Repentance now, on Account of the Difficulty we find in it, this Difficulty will always remain; and instead of growing less, as we vainly hope, it will rather increase and grow strong against us, and if we do not purpose to repent till such Time as we find the Task less difficult, at this Rate, we shall never be able to repent, because we shall always find some Difficulties in our Way. The World will always abound with Temptations: we shall always find in it the same Allurements and Enticements to Sin: "For all that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, & the Pride of Life," will always remain in the World, and continue to tempt, and to deceive, and will have the same Power and Influence over us.

There cannot, therefore be a more vain Imagination than to suppose, that we shall be more disposed to repent hereafter, than we are at this Time. The same Obstacles and the same Impediments will always continue in our Way, unless we endeavour to remove them out of it; and, the longer we delay it, the less likely we shall be to succeed in our Attempt, and the less able to accomplish so great a Concern.

For this Reason, if ever we mean to repent at all,

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we must put our Resolution to it; and the sooner and the more vigorously we set about it, the more likely we shall be to succeed in our Endeavours.

And we ought likewise to consider further, that if we put off our Repentance to any other Time, we cannot assuredly depend upon living to that Time. The Time past is gone: the Time to come, is yet unborn: and, for this Reason, the present Moment is all that we can securely depend upon.

Therefore, if we still continue to provoke God, if we "despise the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, not knowing, and not considering that the Goodness of God leadeth us to Repentance;" how can we tell how soon this may happen to be our own Condition?

Let us therefore, reverence and fear "the Forbearance and Long-suffering of God;" that so it may not prove at last to be our Condemnation: let us either fear the Wrath to come, or else love and embrace that Grace & Mercy which is now offered us through Christ. One or other of these two things we must do, if "we would be found of him in Peace, and be made Partakers of eternal Life."

And let us consider further still, that Repentance is very seldom the Business of a Day only: no; it is very often a Work of Time. Repentance does not

consist in a bare Confession of our Sins, and praying for Pardon. No, it is, (as we have shewn,) such a deep and unfeigned Sense and Acknowledgment of our Guilt, and such a just and awful Apprehension and Dread of the divine Displeasure upon this Account, as produces in us a sincere and hearty Sorrow and Concern for having provoked and offended God, and a thorough Hatred and Detestation of our Sins. And all this is to be accompanied with such a sincere and stedfast Resolution of Amendment, as does, thro' God's Grace, working together with us, produce and "bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance." Or, in a Word, Repentance is a thorough Change of Temper and Disposition, of Mind and Manners, of Life and Actions: and we all know, that this is such a Change as is not to be effected all at once; it is not done only by a Sigh, or a fruitless Velleity of the Mind: No; it is with Difficulty that we bring ourselves to hate and abhor, to loath & detest those Sins which we have loved & lived in all the Days of our Life, This is generally a Work of much Time and Difficulty, which surely, of all Times, the Time of Sicknes is the most unfit for this Purpose. Perhaps our Distemper may be such as to take-off our Thoughts from that and from every thing besides; The Grief and Concern

of our Friends, or It may be our Concern for them, or else, perhaps, the adjusting and settling our worldly Affairs, may divert our Attention from its proper Object; whilst the great Account which is to be made up between God and our own Consciences may remain unsettled, and be left in the utmost Confusion: or else, we may be cut-off suddenly and without any Notice or Warning at all; or, it is possible, that that Grace of God may be denied us in our last Moments, which we have throughout slighted and despised.

What will then become of our late, & death-bed Repentance? We shall then be forced out of this World with all the Guilt of all our Sins upon us unrepented of, and unforgiven.

Is it not, then, (upon the Whole, and in every Part of it,) a desperate Risk? And yet such a Risk as this, desperate and foolish as it is, does every Man run, that puts off his Repentance from Time to Time, till perhaps he hath neither Power, nor Inclination, nor Time to effect it. (*) — And!

What a Reflection is this? What would we not THEN "give in Exchange for our Souls?" How will our Consciences then reproach and upbraid us for

(*) See the Discourse on *Death-bed Repentance*, in this Work.
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for abusing the Mercy and Goodness of God? and wish, in such a Case, that we had in Time given a due Attention to God's Word, read publicly to us, and to the well-digested, affectionate Discourses, constantly addressed to us, and delivered for the Purpose; that we might be "wise unto Salvation," and "repent, and be saved;" For, "when the wicked Man forsakes his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and returns unto the Lord, He will have Mercy upon him, and God will abundantly pardon him."

Sermon

SERMON

The Inexcusableness

**of
obstinate Impenitence.**

**Ezek. xviii. 31. "Why will ye die, O House of
Israel?"**

The Almighty, through this whole Chapter, is expostulating with the rebellious House of Israel: who, as if it had been a small thing that they had violated his Commands, profaned his Name, defiled his Altars, and prostituted his Worship, as if it had not been enough that they had been guilty of gross Idolatry, notorious Oppression, and foul Adultery, with other very heinous and provoking Crimes here recited, proceeded yet farther to murmur against God, to represent him as a cruel and unjust Being, and to exclaim against the Partiality of his Dispensation, and the Severity of his Punishments. So ready are Men to charge their own Miscarriages upon God, and to recriminate when they cannot make a direct Answer to that which they are accused

of; and so true is the Observation of the Wise Man, that "when the Folly of a Man has perverted his Ways, his Heart fretteth against the Lord."

A God so impiously, a Benefactor so ungratefully, a Judge so insolently treated, might justly have been expected to have proceeded in another Manner, and to have spoke in another Language than in affectionate Wishes & pathetical Exhortations, in gentle Expostulations & Terms of Endearment.

But what Provocations are beyond the Endurance of infinite Mercy; to how prodigious a Bulk must that Guilt be swelled, which is more extensive and unbounded than divine Love?

Thus audaciously challenged and affronted, we find him notwithstanding so far from an implacable Spirit, and inflexible Resolution of avenging his injured Honour, that he still persists in his Endeavours by soft and gentle Methods to work their Reformation and prevent their Ruin. "Why will ye die, O House of Israel?"

He who was bound by no other Rule but the inherent Rectitude of his own Nature, whose peculiar Right it was to require an Account of their Actings, vouchsafes to give them an Account of his; he argues the Case calmly and familiarly with them, & appeals to their own Reason, whether he did not,
both

both in the Execution of his Punishments, and the Distribution of his Rewards, proceed according to the strictest Rules of Equity: "Hear now, O House of Israel, (says he,) are not my Ways equal? are not your Ways unequal?" After which Conviction he still leaves it to their Choice, whether they will be happy or miserable; and perceiving them more inclinable to the latter, he addresses himself to them in this other passionate Interrogatory, "Why will ye die, O House of Israel?"

Was it not enough for God, who is accountable only to himself, to be conscious of his own Justice, but must he appeal to sinful Men, and make the Criminals themselves the Judges of it? But this indeed leaves them without Excuse, and it must of Necessity follow from such a Display of his Goodness, and their Perverseness, that, as He is self-justified, so they are self-condemned.

From the Words, therefore, I shall consider the following Particulars:

I. The patient Forbearance and Long-suffering of God.

II. The obstinate Impenitence of a disobedient People.

III. The ill Consequence that will infallibly

attend such a State of final Impenitence, [namely] Death. "Why will ye die." And, to conclude all shortly, That if we finally miscarry and meet with eternal Death for our Portion, we have no One to complain of but ourselves; it is our own voluntary Choice, and we might have prevented it if we would. "Why will ye die?" — And,

First, The first thing observable is the patient Forbearance and Long-suffering of God.

This is a Reflection that is always full of unspeakable Comfort and Satisfaction: This is the Foundation of all our Hopes, the Source of our Pardon, & Security of our Happiness; to this we owe the Delay of our Punishment, and every fresh Opportunity of Repentance; hither is the only Retreat for a wounded Conscience, and Sanctuary for despairing Guilt. "If God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss," if he should show no Forbearance, and his Threats would admit of no Respite or Mitigation, but every Transgression of his Law were to be prosecuted with the utmost Rigour; who then could endure the Severity of his Wrath? or who is that Person, that could stand the Scrutiny of his Justice! "It is of his Mercy alone that we are not consumed, & because his Compassions fail not."

He spares when we deserve Punishment, and in his Wrath he thinketh upon Mercy," choosing rather to proceed by gentle Methods, and instead of compelling, endeavours to win Men to his Service; he courts them at once to their Duty and their Happiness, invites them earnestly to a Reconciliation with him, and solemnly declares, that if they will but turn from all the Transgressions they have committed, they shall not so much as be mentioned to them. Indeed he promises them not only Pardon, but an inestimable Reward. And if ever he has Recourse to Harshness and Severity, it is as it were unwillingly and with Reluctance; so unwillingly, that the Prophet Isaiah calls it "his STRANGE WORK."

III. Of the obstinate Impenitence of a disobedient People.

"It was the Complaint of God himself, that "all the Day-long he had stretched forth his Hands to a disobedient and gain-saying People;" that after he had cultivated his Vineyard with the utmost Care, yet when he expected it should have brought forth Grapes, it brought forth wild Grapes.

There is somewhat so highly ungrateful and dishonourous in some Tempers, that no Favours can win, no Excess of Courtesy oblige them; they grow presumptuous by Indulgence, and insolent by For-

bearance; the very Strength they borrow emboldens them to contend with him that lent it, and those very Motives that should excite them to love and honour, to praise and celebrate their Benefactor, do on the contrary beget in them nothing but Ingratitude and Rebellion.

Such is the Dealing of wicked Men toward God. He bears with their Iniquities, and connives at their Transgressions; he spares them when they deserve Punishment, and long suspends the Execution of his Judgments; to the Intent that so much Lenity and Goodness may at last soften their Nature, and either allure, or reason, or shame them into a Compliance with his Will.

But such is their perverse Obstinacy, that all these engaging Methods of divine Love have a quite contrary Effect; they are so far from relenting at the Thoughts of God's Forbearance, that it hardens them the more; they distrust his Power; they conclude he either cannot, or will not punish, since he has born already with so many Provocations; because "Sentence against their evil Works is not executed speedily, therefore their Hearts are fully set in them to do Evil." — The Danger of this Proceeding comes now,

III. To be considered, wherein I was to set-forth

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the Consequence that will attend such a State of Impenitence, or Perseverance in Sin, [viz.] Death, "Why will ye die?" For though God has no Pleasure at all that the Wicked should die, though he had rather he should return from his Ways & live; yet it is his Decree that such as will not return, shall not live. — And they who will not serve his Purposes in the Way he has appointed will be made the Instruments of his Will in a more fatal and destructive Manner; if his Mercy cannot triumph over them, his Justice will; and they who refuse to glorify him, as pardoned and reconciled Friends, must yet contribute to his Glory as conquered Enemies. This is the natural Effect of Sin, the appointed Wages of Unrighteousness; how calm & undisturbed, how thoughtless soever and free from Care, Men may be in a Course of Impiety, this will be the End that waits them, this melancholy Subject still limits their Prospect; Beyond this they can hope for no Comfort, but have enough of Horror, Misery, and Despair in View. Life and Death are proposed as the Reward of Good and Evil, and he who is irreclaimably bent and addicted to Evil, cannot think it strange if he meets with Death, its inseparable Associate and Attendant.

By Death, is not meant a bare Separation of Soul

and Body, a Cessation of the vital Function and Retirement into the cold and solitary Grave; for this is the common Fate of Righteous, as well as Wicked Men, and both the One and the Other must pass through this into Eternity. — And though it does sometimes please the Almighty to serve some great and signal End of Providence, by making even temporal Death the Reward of daring Guilt and outrageous Impiety; though he has sometimes destroyed by supernatural Means not only private and single Persons, but even whole Nations and Communities, and once a whole World of Sinners, (few only excepted,) when their Offences were grown up to an unusual Size; Indeed, though Death itself first entered into the World upon the first Sin that was committed in our Nature: yet the Death that is here and elsewhere in holy Scripture denounced as the sure and unavoidable Wages of unrepented Sin, is of another Kind, and has something in it far more severe and terrifying than a meer Privation of Existence and Extirpation from the Land of the Living. The Agonies whereof will be far more acute, its Horrors infinitely more piercing and insupportable than those that attend the Separation between the Soul and Body.

¶ This second Death is not a transient Act, but a

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permanent State, and they who shall be doomed
to that heavy Sentence, will die not once, but al-
ways: "They shall be punished with everlasting
Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, and
from the Glory of his Power, into the Lake that
burneth with Fire & Brimstone, continually, which
is the second Death; where the Worm dieth not,
and the Fire is not quenched."

Such will be the impenitent Sinner's Portion,
this the Recompence provided, for him by a justly
incensed God; this Cup of Misery and Sorrow must
he now drink, who refused so often that of Grace
and Salvation: And, will he then complain of the
Severity of God? or will he not rather condemn
himself, & accuse the Heinousness of his own Sins?
which were so provoking as to put the Almighty
under a Sort of Necessity of thus tormenting him,
even against his Will, & contrary to the Tendency
of his Nature.

May he not justly say to thee, after so many
Warnings and Opportunities offered by him, and
by thee neglected, as he did once to the Jews, "O
Israel, thy Destruction is of thyself?" has he not long
borne with thee as with the barren Fig-tree? has he
not dug about thee, and dunged, and watered thee,
to see if at last thou wouldst bring forth Fruits

meet for Repentance? and if after so many Trials thou art still found useless and unprofitable, canst thou think it much, if the Sentence, pronounced against the fruitless Tree, be thine: "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?"

God's Spirit will not always strive with Man; though he is long-suffering, he is not always so; there is a Degree of Provocation beyond the Endurance of infinite Mercy; & there is a Time when the Day of Grace will set, and that of Judgment begin: He is mighty to punish, as well as to preserve. When once his Vengeance is awakened, and his Resentment stirred up, we shall feel what it is to have wearied out such enduring Patience, and insulted such forgiving Goodness.

The conscious Remembrance of our obstinate Folly & base Ingratitude will one Day be awakened; and a thorough Conviction that we have highly deserved the worst that can be inflicted on us, will be no inconsiderable Part of our Punishment, since it will not leave us even the wretched Comfort of complaining of the Hardship of our Sentence, and the Severity of our Judge; but will oblige us, in Despite of ourselves, to confess what I am now going to prove,

IV. That if we do finally miscarry, & meet with
eternal

eternal Death for our Portion, we have no one to complain of but ourselves, it is our own voluntary Choice, & we might have prevented it if we would.

“Why will ye die?”

The Misfortunes and Calamities of this World do indeed frequently overtake the most provident and industrious, and he that has used all necessary Precaution to guard himself against Pain and Sickness, Poverty and Disgrace, and other the Evils and perplexities of this Life, may, without any Fault or Mismanagement of his own, meet with Crosses and Disappointments, and be reduced to great Extremities by sudden and unforeseen Accidents. — But no Man can miscarry in his eternal Concern, and be made more miserable in a future State, but by his own Foolishness and his own ill-conduct. He cannot be ungodly by Chance, nor a Sinner against his Will: It is in the Power of Ill-fortune to make him poor and despicable, but it can never make him wicked. — For,

Though it must be granted, that we are set in the midst of many and great Dangers, yet they are neither more nor greater than every Man knows how to escape: If he will take Pains for it. We are exposed indeed to Trials and Temptations; but no Temptation hath taken us but what is common to

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Men.

Men. God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the Temptation make also a Way to escape."⁸

That the sharpest of these Trials is not insuperable, we make it evidently appear, by our cheerful and vigorous Resistance of them, whenever they stand in Competition with our worldly Interests and Designs.

It is easy for Men to make some plausible Pretences, and allege very specious Arguments to colour the Immorality of their Actions; they may urge in their Defence the alluring Pleasures of Sense, and the irresistible Bent of Nature to close with these Allurements; that the Vices forbidden, are of absolute Necessity, and the Virtues commanded us, as absolutely impracticable; but yet there is scarcely any One that has not had so much Trial of his Faculties, as to be convinced that he can upon Occasion abstain from the most alluring Acts of Sin, and perform the most difficult Achievements, and severest Duties that the Gospel requires of its Professors.

We do not assert that every particular Christian has performed every positive and negative Precept on a religious Account, and in pure Conformity to the Will of God, (not but that we hope, and are persuaded

persecuted: that there are very few, who have not, at some Time or other of their Lives, submitted to the far greatest Part of them, merely on Principles of Conscience,) but this we dare affirm with greater Certainty, that there is scarcely a Man to be found, but what on some human and prudential Consideration, and to serve some secular End at least, hath cheerfully & readily accomplished the most tedious and ungrateful of those Actions, which, when really and sincerely intended to the Glory of God, may justly be denominated Virtues; which is as substantial an Argument against the Plea of NATURAL Incapacity, as if they were religious Actions indeed.

For which, (I would fain know,) of all the Duties of Religion, is it, (by our Aversion to it never so strong,) which we cannot, and do not surmount for the Sake of our worldly Interest and Advantage? What Lust so craving and importunate, that we cannot, and do not refuse to gratify, rather than hazard our Lives, ruin our Fortunes, or expose our Reputations? There is no Passion so exorbitant, no Affection so ardent, no Inclination so deep rooted which we do not daily sacrifice to those Idols, whatever Weakness and Inability we pretend, when required to part with them for the Service of God.

To be more particular: Is it a Pain to be pious

and devout ? Is it a tedious and an unreasonable Task to frequent religious Assemblies, and join in the public Worship of God ? Alas ! how much more than this will the formal Hypocrite perform, merely to make a Show of Religion, without the Substance & Reality, and consequently without the Reward of it ? And, shall we do less for the Praise of God, than he for the Praise of Men ? Or, is the Approbation of our Almighty Judge less worthy to be regarded, than the false and mistaken Applause of Sinners, our Fellow-creatures ? — Again,

Is it a Punishment to be restrained from Oaths and Blasphemy, - to be obliged to check our unmannerly Wit, and irreverent Buffoonery, and to confine ourselves, even in Times of greatest Liberty, to an innocent Mirth and inoffensive Freedom ? As great a Restraint as it is, yet sometimes the most petulant and profane, the most hardened and habitual Swearers, in Compliance with common Decency, and Respect to the Company they are in, can put a Bridle on their Tongues, & abstain from such offensive and shocking Behaviour. — Again, Is Civility and Good-breeding so much a more prevailing Principle than the Love of God ? Has the Presence of a Man so much Awe upon us, and the Presence of God none ? — Again,

Is

It is a severe & unreasonable Task to be obliged to mortify our fleshly Lusts, to deny the importunate Cravings of Nature, and abstain from the Enjoyment of unlawful Pleasure, though solicited by never so vehement Desires, and irritated by never so fair Opportunities? This indeed is what too many are apt to complain of, as a very grievous and insupportable Yoke, as a rigid and merciless Imposition and Invasion of their natural Rights. And yet this is nothing, if compared with those voluntary Severities which these very Murmurers inflict upon themselves. For where can there be any Self-denial equal to that of the penurious wretched Miser, who, to scrape together an useless Treasure, forgoes all the Pleasures and Enjoyments of Life, exercises the most vile and sordid Acts of Baseness, denies himself not only Conveniences, but even Necessaries too, and is half famished in the midst of Plenty?

Nor is the ambitious Man less eager in the Pursuit of empty Honour. For this he doeth not scruple to expose himself to numberless Hazards and Fatigues, and is not at all discouraged by them, but makes it his Choice, when he might indulge himself in Ease and Quiet, to be indefatigable, restless, and unwearied in the most arduous Concerns.

These & a thousand other Instances, (we presumed)

might be produced, as a sufficient Confirmation how far the mere Power of Nature can go in resisting Temptation, in enabling us to defy both Pleasure and Pain, and fortifying us as well against the Softnesses and Blandishments of prosperous, as against the Trials & Extremities of adverse Fortune. If then, by our natural Strength alone, we are able to do & suffer so much, with how much greater Ease may we undergo the same Discipline on a religious Account, where we are sure of the Assistances of Grace, as well as of Nature? So that in Order to our becoming truly pious and good, it is not necessary for us, in many Cases, to act any otherwise than we do already, but only to perform the same Action on better Principles; and sure, barely to INTEND and MEAN WELL, is no such hard and rigorous Imposition.

Let us be temperate and sober, and as moderate in the Use of corporeal Refreshments, for the Sake of God and a good Conscience, as many are to escape a temporal Inconvenience! Let us mortify our carnal Lusts, and abstain from fleshly Gratifications, not so much to preserve our Health and Reputation, (tho' they also ought to be regarded,) as to secure our Title to Heaven; from the Inheritance of which, all evil Doers will be forever excluded.

In fine, let us be affectionately devout & zealous in the Service of God, not that we may gain the Applause of Men, but that we may approve and commend ourselves to our Heavenly Father, "who seeth in secret, & will not fail to reward us openly." For surely, there can be no Endeavours so vain, no Labour so foolishly misplaced, as that of the Hypocrite, who with half the Pains which he takes to appear a good Man, might be One, in Deed and in Truth.

There is nothing, then, so difficult in Religion, but what may be overcome by a willing Mind and settled Resolution; we are all furnished with sufficient Capacities to discharge our Duty to God as we ought, which requires nothing more of us, except a good Intent, than what we daily and constantly practice. Whatever our Obstructions and Discouragements are, it is certain our Assistances are as great. If we have spiritual Enemies to encounter, we have spiritual Armour to fortify ourselves against them, if we will but be at the Pains to put it on, and exert it. — In a Word,

We know what our Duty is; we feel within ourselves a Power of performing it, thro' the divine Assistance, which will never be wanting to such as faithfully implore it, and improve it; and we know what will be the Consequence if we do not.

So that in Case of our Miscarriage after all, we must be looked upon as the Authors and Procurers of our own Ruin; our Destruction is of Ourselves, and if we will perish, we must. God himself hath provided no Remedy for inveterate Obstinacy; and if his Calls and Invitations, his Threats and Promises, his Admonitions and Entreaties have none of them any Effect on us, we may, & must thank ourselves for what is likely to befall us hereafter, and consequently charge all our Sufferings on our own incorrigible Stubbornness and Perversity.

Having thus gone thro the several Particulars I proposed, the Reflections resulting from it, furnishing many useful Inferences for our Conduct, I shall now offer, as Improvements upon the Whole.

And first, — From the Long-suffering of God, and his bearing with so many Indignities and Affronts before he proceeds to make us the Example of his Justice; we may very naturally infer our Obligation to a like Deportment toward our offending Brethren. — This is the only Condition on which we presume to ask for Pardon ourselves; we desire our Heavenly Father to forgive us, but on the same Degree that we forgive others. — Again,

From this admirable Patience and Lenity of God, we may further learn to avoid Despair.

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Though every the least Sin is in its own Nature mortal, and renders us liable to eternal Vengeance, and our own Sins are innumerable; still let us not sink into Despondency and Dejection, nor give ourselves over for lost and reprobate. We have still a Refuge and Retreat. So long as there is Grace enough left in us to ask for Pardon, there is Goodness sufficient in God to grant it. — Again,

As the Consideration of the Slowness of God's Judgments may sufficiently arm us against Despair, so the Swiftness of them may caution us against Presumption. It is dangerous trespassing too far even on Divine Goodness. It is extreme Folly as well as inexcusable Ingratitude to irritate & defy, to slight and trifle with our Almighty Judge, in Confidence of his Long-suffering and Forbearance, and with an intended Reserve of making him amends by a late Repentance and Submission. How uncertain these Opportunities are, and how seldom embraced when offered, we very well know; and surely therefore, no wise Man will build his everlasting Hopes on so feeble a Foundation. It is possible indeed to work out our Salvation, so long as we have the Day before us, but no one knows how soon the Night may overtake him, "in which no Man can work."

Let us remember the Argument St. Peter uses to some, who, he was aware, would flatter themselves, and

and draw some deceitful Conclusions, from the delay of God's Judgments: "Beloved, (says he,) be not ignorant of this one thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day." Though we are obliged to watch Times and Opportunities, which, when once gone, can never be recalled by us, yet God is limited by no Time, and can accomplish his Purposes as well some Ages hereafter as at this present Moment. All Eternity to come is his proper Season; the present Minute alone is securely ours, which we may improve for our everlasting Salvation. — But,

Lastly, From this Exposition of God with sinful Men, "Why will ye die?" we may assuredly conclude, that we are under no absolute, irresistible Decree of Reprobation. What we will, we chuse; now Choice implies a Power of refusing, or otherwise it is no Choice; and if we can indifferently either take or leave a thing, how can we be said to be absolutely and unconditionally determined to either? Would the Almighty thus reason the Case with us, and demand of us why we would do a thing which he himself had made it impossible for us not to do?

If we do die then eternally, it is because we will; he has offered us the Refusal of a far better Portion; and if we think fit, we may embrace it.

Prevalency of Infidelity, no Proof
The credulous multitude may ask, "When Christ
came, will he be no more in the?" But
what Attention have they raised from Men of
universe? The Ignorance may say, "O a foolish this
is the way of the world, of the Pharisees,
deduced from him."

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Prevalency of Infidelity, no Proof nor Presumption against Christianity.

John vii. 48. "Have any of the Rulers, or of
"the Pharisees believed on him?"

This Question was deemed sufficient to confound
the Witnesses of our Lord's Power and Wisdom,
who had ingenuously acknowledged the Manifesta-
tions of his divine Authority. They had been com-
missioned by the chief Priests and Pharisees to seize
him as a Seducer, and to bring him before the great
Council, there to answer for his supposed Impiety.
They listened to his Doctrine: they were filled with
Reverence and Admiration: "no Man laid Hands
on him:" they return; and in the Ardour of Asto-
nishment exclaim, "never Man spake like this
Man!" But here they are insulted as ignorant and
vulgar, possessed with illiberal Prejudices, and de-
ceived by Pretences which could have no Effect on
Minds more enlightened. They are told of the De-
ference due to the Great & Learned of their Nation.

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The credulous Multitude may ask, "When Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these?" But what Attention have these gained from Men of Eminence? The Ignorant may say, "of a Truth this is the Prophet:" but "have" any of the Great or Learned, "any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?"

Many Points of Instruction might naturally be deduced from this Passage. But it is my Purpose to apply it to present Times and Occasions in a Manner more especially adapted to the Circumstances of the rising Generation, who may be in Danger of being seduced by these or the like Artifices.

That divine Teacher, who spake as never Man spake, still addresses his Precepts, his Exhortations, his Promises, his Threatenings, to us, in all Wisdom and Goodness, with all Dignity and Authority. The Words of eternal Life are here inculcated on the weak and inexperienced, "Precept upon Precept, and Line upon Line;" and it is their Glory and their Happiness, (if they indeed "continue in the things which they have learned and been assured of,)" that each "from a Child hath known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make him wise unto Salvation. But the Time may come when false Teachers

Teachers shall labour to learn away their Bats from the Truth. And, to prepare the Mind for other Delusions, they may perhaps begin with these or such-like Insinuations.

You have (they may say,) been trained in the Practice of Christianity. You have been taught to reverence its Doctrines, to cherish its Hopes, and to dread its Threatenings. But, advancing as you now are, to a more extensive Knowledge of the World, what Defiance do you find paid to these things, but by the obscure and reclusive, Men whose Minds are fettered by Prejudice, and enslaved by Authority? Do those of liberal Intercourse and exalted Condition, appear at all influenced by what you have been instructed to esteem so sacred? Look round you to the Men of greatest Reputation for Science and Erudition. How many of these have laboured to dispel those Mists of Error in which superstitious Ages have been so long involved? Have they not all vanished before the Brightness of their Reasoning: Away then with the Prepossessions of our childish Days, and let us freely follow the pleasant Paths of Nature, unrestrained by Illusions of Bigotry and pious Fraud.

It is inconsistent as it must appear for these Pretenders to unbiased Reason, thus to recur to Authority,

the Authority of weak and corrupted Men; yet it may be necessary to guard the unwary against their Artifice. For this Purpose, I would now point your Attention to that Object which they display before us with so much Triumph; the Prevalence of Unbelief among the great and learned. And the first Point I would enforce is this, that,

1. It is by no Means a Presumption against the Truth of our Religion, that in the active and exalted Scenes of Life, Men reject its Authority, either by their Practice or Professions.

For the present, let us suppose the Fact to be, as stated by the Adversary. And, on the first View of Society; there may appear some Ground for the Supposition. — Although many, who there support Characters of Eminence, have, we trust, received the fullest Impressions of Religion, and, through all the Tumult and Agitation of this Life, look steadily to the Blessings of a more glorious Existence; yet the Light of their Examples is intercepted by the busy Crowd in which they are engaged. They who force themselves on our Attention, and from whom we generally form our Judgment, are such as, from their early Days, have been directed only to the World and its Enjoyments. Nurtured in Pride and Prosperity, with every seducing Object presented to their

short View, they lift into public Life, with Imaginations undisciplined, Passions undisciplined, and Understandings imperfectly cultivated. They may have gained those superficial Acquirements which are thought to adorn their Stations. In every Art of Elegance they may be deeply learned, and exquisitely refined. But the severe Pursuit of solid Knowledge is intolerable to the undisciplined and untaught. And the Words of eternal Life, perhaps, have neither been impressed with due Care, nor entertained with that Satisfaction so necessary to their effectual Improvement. These Men are placed in such Circumstances as command Respect and Defence, without a scrupulous or rigorous Discussion of their real Merit. Their Prosperity is intoxicating; they are countenanced and flattered by those around them, who are attached to the same Objects, and engaged in the same Pursuits. Every Instance in which their Schemes have been successful, serves to confirm them in exalted Notions of their own Abilities, which have perhaps raised them to what they call Honour and Distinction. The Bustle of the little Scene in which they are engaged keeps their Minds in a perpetual Ferment; & their retired Enjoyments, if in any Degree licentious, leave neither Leisure nor Power for serious & enlightened Reflection.

Whatever Deference may be due to such Men, in our worldly Intercourse; however distinguished their Abilities may appear in those things which have engrossed their Attention: yet surely, neither their Situation nor Engagements seem to qualify them to become Detectors of religious Error. They may, without profound Reflection, discover the advantageous Influence of Religion upon social Life. They may speak of it with Respect, as an Instrument of Policy, necessary for restraining the lower Orders of Mankind; yet still as an Invention calculated merely for this Purpose. In this Decision, they may applaud their own Discernment, and rejoice in their Superiority to all mean Prejudice and Superstition. But before this Decision can have any Weight, either with themselves or others, there must be a Conviction that it is founded, not on a slight & careless Advertence to the Subject; not on some popular Objection, some apparent Difficulty casually suggested and rashly entertained; but on candid, serious, attentive, repeated Examination. He who decides either in Favour or in Prejudice of a Matter so momentous, on any other Grounds, evidently forsores all Claim to our Attention. It may be therefore worthy of Enquiry, whether it be not highly probable, that the Men now described, (and many

many such there must be, of no small Regard in civil Life,) never have examined the Evidence of our Faith; and whether it be not a Subject which they scarcely can examine with Attention and Impartiality.

But these are Points which seem, from the very Nature of the Case, to be at once decided.

The Days of Dissipation and pleasurable Indulgence, are evidently not the Days of religious Enquiry. It is not the Business of a Mind imperfectly cultivated, an Imagination warm and giddy, Passions violent, and solicited by perpetual Allurements. The Turbulence of public Life leaves no Leisure for those Thoughts, which rise beyond the Sphere of present Objects, how interesting soever and important they may appear. - In what happy Interval can the Man, immersed in the Business, the Contentions, and Competitions of this World, be enabled or disposed to consider the things not of this World? Shall the Word of Truth, which he hath been habituated to despise, obtain at once, in any Period of his Engagements, a serious and dispassionate Attention? Let us imagine him, in some Moment of Reflection, reading or conversing on the Subject of Religion. In either Case, "the humble Preacher of Righteousness approaches him without

worldly Dignity, without Artifice or Flattery. Could he assure him that the Service of God (and that of the World were perfectly consistent; that they might go on in amicable Union, without the least Hazard of the divine Displeasure, or the least Interruption to the Pursuits even of the most corrupt & sensual; he might possibly obtain a patient Audience. But his Preaching is of a different Kind. He thwarts what such Men consider as the Business & the Pleasures of their Life, with Doctrines of a different Nature. He tells them that their Pursuits, however captivating, are no more than "Vanity & Vexation of Spirit;" that high-minded as they may be, they have fixed on the most sordid Objects; that they must mortify their corrupt Affections, and look with a due Indifference to the things of this World, while they press forward to an eternal Inheritance.

But what Acceptance can such Doctrines gain, when the fastidious Hearer is already prepossessed? Far from prevailing over inveterate Habits, rooted Prejudices, and disordered Passions; they must be received with Aversion and Indignation, as a presumptuous Attempt to interrupt his favourite Pursuits; with Scorn and Derision, as an insolent Claim to a Superiority in Understanding, over those whom the World pronounces wise and discerning.

This

This Preacher comes in the Name of the great God of Heaven and Earth; & while he denounces the Sentence of "Tribulation and Anguish," while he discloses the Mystery of Grace and Mercy, offers at the same Time the most reasonable Evidence of the Authority by which he speaks. But his Doctrines are received with Impatience and Disgust; his Evidence is weighed in the false Balance of Prejudice and Corruption, with a Desire to find it weak and insufficient. And let this fatal Prepossession once engage the Mind, the clearer the Evidence appears, the more must it be hated, and, of Consequence, the more violently opposed. Or, should it force its Way through all the Obstacles of Depravity, it may be entertained for a while, but without a permanent and lively Influence: vicious Habits and disordered Passions soon resume their Power: and "the last State of that Man," now returning to his usual Engagements, "is worse than the first."

Such is the natural Progress of the Contest between Religion and Corruption. But what is this to the Cause of our holy Faith? Is it impaired, or at all affected by the Prejudices, by the Passions, by the Disorders and Perversions of the human Mind? Is Truth of so precarious a Nature, that it may be al-

tered or subverted merely at the good Pleasure of the negligent, the confident, and presuming? Is the Evidence of Religion less bright, because the obstinate turn away from it? or its Motives less powerful, because Sinners resist their Influence?

And say not thou, that Truth must have its due Impression on enlightened Minds; and that the things rejected by the Intelligent and Enlightened cannot be true. Truth can make no Impression when it is not examined and considered; when it is excluded and rejected. We do not object to the Certainty of any self-evident Proposition because the Men engaged in other Studies will not purchase the Knowledge of it by the necessary Deductions, or because their Capacities are so contracted that they are not capable of the Investigation, or their Dispositions so averse to abstract Reasoning that they despise or detest it, or because they coldly reject a Study tending to interrupt their worldly Pursuits. And as to the Degree of Understanding and Illumination annexed to higher Stations and Engagements, we may not always judge of this with Impartiality & Discernment. Whatever be the worldly Employment to which we are attached, it necessarily contracts & concentrates the Mind to one favourite Object. The Politician is oftentimes as confined

in

justice Views, and an incapability of judging of any Matter beyond his Department, as the Mechanic. In the Eye of Man, his Engagements may be splendid and elevated, but they have their Bounds as well as the less liberal Employments; and beyond these the Mind unused to pass, is darkened in the strange and untroubled Region.

The Case of the Men now described is the same with that of the unbelieving Rulers in the Days of our blessed Lord. These had their Corruptions and Prepossessions, to which the Doctrine of Jesus was utterly unfriendly. Hence they either neglected or envied at this Doctrine. The Declarations of the Prophets were explicit; but they refused to search the Scriptures. The Evidence of Miracles, though never beheld with Indifference, yet, as in the Days of their Forefathers, proved by no Means irresistible. They tortured their Invention to account for them, without doing Violence to their Prejudices: and they contented themselves with the most irrational and absurd Solutions. Indeed, we find them proceeding to an Extravagance seemingly unnatural. When at the Command of our Lord the Dead arose from his Grave, and thus stupendously manifested the Power of God, the Glory of this Evidence served but to provoke their Rage; and when they could

no longer doubt or dispute, they sought to destroy the Person on whom this Miracle was wrought.

When, therefore, we attribute the Disregard or Disbelief of our Religion; (too frequently observed in the active and exalted Orders of Men,) to their Engagements, their Passions, their Corruptions and Prepossessions, which render them inattentive to the Evidence, and averse from the Doctrine of the Gospel, which incense them against the Truth, and harden them against its Influence, the Causes we assign are fully sufficient to account for this prevailing Scandal; they are such as, without any Violence to christian Charity, seem naturally deduced from their Circumstances and Engagements; and such as, we are assured, have in other like Instances, operated with all the Power we ascribe to them. — And,

Far be it from us, to urge them in the Spirit of Pride or conscious Superiority. Even among those who “name the Name of Christ,” there is found an Opposition to Reason still more affecting; we mean in those who believe, and yet remain uninfluenced; who are forced by their Passions from the Paths of Righteousness, at the very Time when they acknowledge these to be the only Paths of Truth and Happiness. And, more especially, if among those who have full Leisure to search, to try, and to examine,

who

who have no Engagements or Avocations, fewer Trials or Temptations to deviate from the Religion which they profess, any should prove insolent or obdurate, must we not acknowledge this a grosser and more glaring Contradiction to Principle, than any to be found in the avowed Gainsayer? He disclaims and renounces the Authority of his Lord and Master, and thus acts unreasonably, but not inconsistently. He doth not acknowledge that Authority, and at the same Time resist and defy it. He doth not "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;" but he doth not, with the insolent Mockery of his Murderers, crown him with the Emblems of Royalty, and bow the Knee before him.

What still aggravates the Heinousness of this Discordance of the nominal Christian's Conduct with the Declaration of his Lips is, that the Mischief terminates not in himself. He "gives Occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." He is, in Effect, "the Enemy of the Cross of Christ;" by supporting and countenancing those who are formally and openly so. He adds to the Illusions wherewith "the Children of this World" deceive themselves, who priding themselves in their Knowledge of Manhood, triumph in every Instance of such Inconsistency in those who pretend to be "Children of

"Light:" and fortify themselves with the imaginary Discovery, that Men do not themselves believe what they attempt to obtrude on others.

But, — Altho' it be allowed that the Disbelief of the Men hitherto described, may fairly be imputed to a blinded Understanding and an evil Heart; still, what shall we say of those retired Votaries of Knowledge, those Men of Refinement and Speculation, who have studied, examined, and rejected the Gospel? — Let us now, therefore,

II. Consider, whether their Authority be a Proof or Presumption against the Truth of our Religion.

And "herein is a marvelous thing!" that a Religion first propagated in the midst of Learning and Refinement, tried at the Tribunal of Reason, approved by judicious and accurate Enquiry, corrupted in Times of Darkness, recovering its Purity with the Revival of Knowledge, strengthened and confirmed by the gradual Increase of intellectual Improvement; espoused and defended by the most illustrious in the human Science, should now at Length be deemed the Idol of Ignorance and the Scorn of the Wise! — But, who are the Wise that affect this Scorn? Are they the attentive laborious Prosecutors of Knowledge; the glorious Luminaries of Science,

men, who have spread its Influence thro' the World; the illustrious Sages who have directed and adorned Society: In these our Religion finds its most ardent Defenders. — Or, are they Men who owe the greater Part, if not the whole, of their Reputation, to this their Opposition to the Gospel? If so, is there not Reason to suspect that the Gainsayer may be oftentimes exalted far beyond his real Deserving? for, “Many, (as it hath been affirmed,) talk of the Truth, who never sounded the Depth from whence it springeth.”

If he lives in the midst of Superstition and Idolatry, he may without any extraordinary Abilities discover, that the Religion of his Country cannot be from God. He may point his Ridicule against its corrupt Doctrines with sufficient Liveliness, and yet without any wonderful Elevation of Genius; just as he may point his Invective against the Cruelty of Persecution, without any extraordinary or exalted Benevolence. Yet still he may not have the ingenious Caution and Discernment necessary to distinguish the Corruptions from the pure and essential Parts of Christianity. He may wantonly extend his Censure to these, and be admired; although he but repeats the Arguments in one Country, which have been repeatedly and effectually refuted in another.

Where Religion is professed in greater Purity, he may find Doctrines which shock the Pride of Reason, and may glory in that Freedom which examines them without Reserve or Scruple. Yet he may be precipitate enough to confound the Doctrines which transcend, with those which contradict his Reason : or he may deride the trite Distinction. Yet it may not be the less just, because frequently repeated. He may be offended at the endless Subjects of religious Controversy, in a State of religious Liberty : he may conclude that every System is equally false. Yet this may be the Conclusion of a rash, an indolent, an inattentive Reasoner. And Genius and Understanding do not always secure against Rashness, Indolence, and Inattention.

In general we know, that an inferior Degree of intellectual Powers is sufficient for objecting, perplexing, and confounding. In Times more distinguished for the superficial Elegancies of Knowledge, than for deep Inquiry and collected Reasoning, even this inferior Degree may be admired and applauded. And he who employs his Abilities, of whatever Rank or Degree, in Opposition to our Faith, hath already gained the whole Tribe of the corrupt and vicious, (a powerful Party,) in his Favour. Prejudiced and partial to the Advocates of their

Folly,

Folly; they easily mistake an affected ostentatious
 Delicacy for Liberality of Sentiment; a Liveliness
 and Extravagance of Fancy for Acuteness and Pen-
 etration; bold Assertion for Argument and Know-
 ledge; fluent Elocution for just Reasoning; dark-
 ened Subtlety for deep and critical Disquisition: and
 because these Men have not been convinced, or ac-
 knowledged a Conviction, they may rashly and ig-
 norantly conclude that they have never been confu-
 ted. RASHLY (I say) and IGNORANTLY; for Argu-
 ments the most powerful cannot always have their
 due Influence: nor can Conviction operate on
 Minds indisposed to the Truth. — And,
 May not Men of Science and Speculation be sub-
 ject to the same Indispositions with the active Part
 of Mankind? Are not their Minds equally liable to
 be prejudiced against the Truth; their Hearts equal-
 ly liable to be alienated from it; their Tempers
 equally liable to be incensed against it? — Let it
 not be deemed invidious to observe, that they who
 contend against the Authority of our Religion, may
 not always be unexceptionable in their moral Con-
 duct. This may be no considerable Impediment to
 their Pursuit of human Knowledge. The vicious
 Men of intellectual Abilities, may proceed in a
 mathematical Disquisition with the utmost Regu-
 larity.

larity. He can here judge of Evidence exactly, detect a Fallacy most acutely, and steer his Course successfully through the most perplexed and difficult Researches. His Passions do not attend him in his Progress; and are by no Means interested in his Conclusions. Whatever he may collect, or however he may decide, his Sensuality is not condemned, his Pride is not mortified, his Malice is not restrained. He hath, therefore, no Temptation to deviate from the exact Line of Reason and Evidence. Not so in his religious Enquiries. When he is to enquire into the Truth and Divinity of the Gospel, with all its Precepts of Purity and Meekness and Benevolence, the Question, (in Effect, at least in its immediate Consequence,) is nothing less than whether the Pursuits of all his Days have not been vain and abominable; whether the Judgments of the Almighty be not denounced against them; whether he should not subdue those Affections which now enslave him, and humble himself before his Fellow-creature, who hath been injured by his Insolence or Oppression?

In such Enquiries, neither Knowledge, nor Refinement, nor Penetration, can render such Men competent Judges. For while they pretend to such a Scrutiny of other Evidence, they are the readiest

to make the Evidence of the greatest Deceivers in the World their own Passions. And to this, I fear, we are in a great Measure to impute it, that there is no one Species of false and sophistical Argument, of Subterfuge, Artifice, and Cavil, Perplexity, Confusion, and Inconsistency, but abounds in their Reasonings, who are deemed the most distinguished in the Cause of Infidelity.

Every Occupation or Profession hath its peculiar Distempers, of the Mind as well as the Body: Men of Speculation experience Both. Let us suppose a Case which frequently occurs, and which surely renders the Sufferer an Object of tenderest Compassion. Suppose the Brilliancy of Genius clouded, and the native Vigour of the Mind relaxed by exquisite Sensibility trembling alive to every gloomy or disagreeable Impression. The Man of this irritable Mind & this relaxed Frame is querulous, restless, dissatisfied, he repines, he accuses the Author of what he calls his Misery: he cannot bear these cheerful Views of Providence with which Christianity presents him. He pronounces them false, for they accord not with his immediate Feelings. — Suppose him most liberal, and more conversant with the World: he has been habituated to regard those Excesses, condemned so severely by the Gospel, without Abhorrence.

His Habits, his Self-will, and Self-flattery, determine him against those Doctrines which suppose or express the exceeding Heinousness of his Conduct, and which, if true, must render him debased and loathsome in his own Sight.

Let us suppose, however, that these Speculative Men, who have at any Time contended against our Faith, were not under the Dominion of the more disordered Passions: that they have really acquired that philosophical Refinement and Composure, which they sometimes affect. Still there are Passions no less Enemies to Truth, though their Objects be not merely sensual. Do not the Love of Fame, - the Vanity of being distinguished, - the Impatience of being carested and admired, - the Hope of being transmitted to Posterity, as the great Reformers of a superstitious World, - the Conquerors of general Prejudice, and the victorious Combatants of Error? Do not these pervert the Judgment? And surely Men are not defended from them by Science and Erudition.

Few there are who do not over-rate their intellectual Powers; who do not secretly exult in a conscious Superiority over those around them. And how shall this Superiority be displayed? In Times when every Art and Science have been improved

to the utmost, what Resources for the Man that aspires to literary Distinction? New Improvements in human Science, it would be intolerable, it would be precarious, it would be hopeless to attempt. The Aspiring and Confident, therefore, strike naturally into the Path of Opposition to Opinions generally held sacred. The most eminent in human Knowledge have asserted and defended them. To deny them, therefore, is to enter the Lists with the most eminent in human Knowledge; an Object highly flattering to Vanity and Self-opinion.

○ If these Passions be not eminently discoverable in the Disputer of this World, what meaneth his perpetual glorying in his own Wisdom? - His affected Contempt, and rigorous Censure of all those whom he opposes? To what can we ascribe his precipitate and peremptory Decisions on the Nature of the Infinite and Unsearchable, and the Ways of his adorable Providence? - His extravagant Paradoxes, those feeble Efforts of a perverse Mind, that is plunged into Absurdity, by straining at something new and extraordinary? Or what hath given Birth to his laboured Attempts at Subtlety and sceptical Reasoning, obtruded with all the Triumph of Confidence and Self-conceit? Or what but Vain-glory can prompt any one to propagate his Unbelief?

When the Advocate for Religion stands forth in its Defence, he may be accused of interested or sinister Motives: but he hath a fair and reasonable Account to render of his Conduct. He pleads that it is his bounden Duty and Service; and that he labours for the temporal and eternal Interests of his Fellow-creatures. But, when the Adversary displays his untoward Zeal, what can he reply to the Charge of Vain-glory? Not that he obeys the Commands of God, when he denies or doubts his Existence, or declares that this adorable Being beholds not "the things that are on Earth." - Not that he "looks to the Recompence of Reward;" for he hopes but to lie-down with the Beasts that perish. Not that he reveres and vindicates the Majesty of Heaven. The hideous Vanity of such a Plea is at once discoverable in the Man who mistates, or rashly misconceives those Particulars, which he presumes to call injurious to this Majesty. Nor can he pretend a Concern for the Welfare of Society, when he opposes a Religion of Peace and Benevolence, the most effectual Support and brightest Ornament of social Life: when he labours to break down the surest Barrier against Violations of Right and Order, to subvert the most powerful Motives to every laudable Pursuit; to stifle the Remorse of the Oppres-

for,

the Presumption against Christianity. 91, 92

and to aggravate the Sorrows of the afflicted, to harden the already hardened Heart, and to thunder Despair into the Ear, in which Humanity should infuse the fairest Hopes and tenderest Consolations.

Whence, therefore, it is urged that many Wise, and many Contemplative, and many Men of Knowledge and Refinement, have opposed our holy Faith, let it be remembered, that the wise Man hath his Weakness and Imperfections, the contemplative and refined their Prejudices and Perversions. But whether the Despisers of God's holy Law wilfully shut their Eyes against the Consequences of their Presumption, or whether they deceive their own Hearts, it is our Part to be guarded against the Danger of their Example.

For this Purpose I have thus endeavoured to inculcate that Principle, for which they affect to contend with so much Zeal; that you are not to be influenced by Authority; but to labour freely and dispassionately in the Search of Truth; that you are not to be offended, because Men are found indifferents to what they have not examined, or are incapable of examining; because they are averse to a Doctrine mortifying to their Pride, and odious to their Corruptions; or because the superficial, the vicious, or the vain-glorious Pretender to Speculation

tion hath contended against it. Doth this little Band of Gain-sayers seem considerable enough to demand your Attention ? Behold, then ! we claim your Attention for a Society infinitely more numerous and venerable. We set before you the glorious Company of Apostles, the noble Army of Martyrs, the Redeemed of all Nations and Ages, the Assembly of Christ's faithful Followers, who have sprung up even in the most corrupted Times; the Good, and the Wise, and the Learned, in whose Lives and Labours his heavenly Doctrine hath shone out gloriously and irresistibly. With one Voice they call upon you ; they adjure you by the Mercies of the living God , to use all Diligence "to make your Calling & Election sure : " Not to submit blindly & implicitly, but to try, to prove , to exercise that Portion of Reason, to embrace those Opportunities of Instruction which God hath granted you , before the Distractions of the World have dissipated, before its Allurements have seduced, before Corruption and Vanity have blinded and perverted you.

Listen to the awful Admonition. So shall the " God of all Grace stablish, strengthen , and settle you " in a steadfast & lively Faith ; that Faith which shall preserve you " blameless and harmless amidst a perverse Generation ; " which shall make every Action of your Lives gracious and amiable, and prove at once your Guide & Comfort thro the Perplexities and Dangers, and Calamities of this mortal State ; which will raise you to the Glory for which you were created and redeemed ; to the eternal Inheritance of the Sons of God, thro' Christ our Lord.

Sermon

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SERMON CIX.

Of Faith, &c. in Opposition to Infidelity.

John xiv. 1. "Ye believe in God, believe also

in me."

To "believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," is the universal Creed of Nature and Reason. But divine Revelation adds further Professions to it; of which the first is, that of Faith in our Blessed Redeemer; whose Direction is, "Ye believe in God; believe also in Me."

We may infer from these Words, in general Terms, that as there is a plain Gradation, from natural to revealed Religion, and a great Union and Harmony between them; therefore, every honest impartial Mind is, at it were, favourably predisposed and induced, by the FORMER, sincerely to believe and practise the LATTER. (*)

"No Human Reason, well-improved, makes us the more capable of Divinity for, all the Duties in the Christian Religion, that respect God, are no other than what Natural Light prompted Men to, except the

"No Man, (says our Blessed Saviour,) can come to me," (i.e.) can become a good Christian, "except the Father which hath sent me; draw him; every Man that hath heard the Father cometh unto me;" (i.e.) No Man can effectually believe in Christ, except he first Believe in God. Natural Religion is the best Preparative for the Reception of the Christian. (*)

The Love of Truth and Virtue in general is the Dispensation of the FATHER, as the Doctrine of the Gospel, in particular, is the Dispensation of the SON. — Now,

As no Man can receive Christ, who has not first "heard," and is thus "drawn by the Father," so "no one can hear the Father," (i.e.) can come to God, unless he first have Faith and Believe in him.

The Sacraments, and praying to God in the Name and Mediation of Christ. That Religion, indeed, seems to be, which is most reasonable; especially, if we consider how much of Interest, and the strong Impressions of Education, there is in That which many call Religion.

Enthusiasts of all Kinds have been very apt to imagine, that by magnifying the Certainty and Assurance of Faith, even above the Evidence of Sense, they greatly promote the Glory of God and the Honour of Religion: not considering, that in Reality, on the contrary, by subverting the Nature of things, they subvert the Foundation of that very Faith, which they fancy they were establishing. For Faith or Belief, in the Nature of the thing, necessarily supposes, that there is some Reason for believing; otherwise it is but Faith, but a groundless Delusion. And this Ground or Reason of Belief, whatsoever it be, cannot possibly but be always Somewhat, which we already know, either by the Use of our Senses, or by necessary and demonstrative Certainty. The Certainty of Knowledge therefore, of the things which we know by immediate Intuition, either of the Eye or of the Mind, must necessarily be prior to the Assurance of Faith, and consequently more strong in the Degree of Evidence; as any Foundation, in any Case whatsoever, must be of Strength to support what shall be built upon it. The Credibility of things not seen, cannot but depend upon the Certainty of the things that are seen: and Faith or Belief, in its highest possible Degree of Assurance, can essentially be nothing more, than a well-grounded Expectation of things future, in Consequence of what we see already past; or a rational Assent to the Reality of things absent and invisible, in Consequence of what we have seen or known to be present. To endeavour to raise the Evidence of Faith higher than this, is entirely to destroy it. For, what St. Paul says concerning Hope, ("Hope that is seen, is not Hope, for what a Man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with Patience wait for it.") may with equal Reason be applied to Faith also. In a Man's assenting to what he sees, or knows; there is nothing of Faith, but Science only.

That many invisible things are real, is evident from the continual Effects of Nature, which are all of them produced by invisible Powers; and from thence the Being of God, is strictly demonstrable. But they who have not Capacities to apprehend the Demonstration, have yet sufficient Reason, from what they see able to observe and understand, to be fully persuaded of the Truth of God's Being, and of the Government of the World. In like Manner, The Judgment concerning, and the future permanent State of Happiness or Misery, are things not capable of the Evidence of Sense, nor demonstrable in any other Way than that of Moral Certainty. Yet the rational Evidence arising from the Consideration of the Perfections of God, and of the

The Dispensation of the Father, of Creation, and natural Religion, is a necessary Preparative for the Dispensation of the Son; (i.e.) the Gospel,

The Scriptures of the old Testament, which were committed to the Jewish Nation, and which, notwithstanding their present Conduct, they continue so venerate as the Word of God, speak of the Messiah as a Redeemer who should come to Zion. In Consequence of which, that Nation has been for many Ages expecting him.

Concerning the Messiah it was foretold, (Gen. xlix. 10.) that he "should come, before the Scepter departed from Judah:" And accordingly, Christ appeared a little before the Time, when the Jewish Government was totally destroyed by the Destruction of the second Temple, (Hagg. ii. 7;) "The Desire of all Nations shall come, and I will fill this House with Glory, saith the Lord of Hosts; - the Glory of this latter House shall be greater than the former:" And accordingly Christ appeared, some Time before the Destruction of the City & Temple.

It was foretold that he should come at the End of 490 Years, after the restoring of Jerusalem which had been laid waste during the Captivity, (Dan. ix. 24;) and that he should "be cut off;" and that, after That, "the City and Sanctuary should be destroyed

Serm. CIX.

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stroyed and made desolate :” And accordingly, at what Time soever the Beginning of the four hundred and ninety Years can, according to any Interpretation of the Words, be fixt; the End of them will fall about the Time of Christ’s appearing; and it is well known how entirely the “City and Sanctuary were destroyed some Years after his being cut off.” — It was foretold that he should do many great and beneficial Miracles; that “the Eyes of the Blind (Isai. xxxv. 5,) should be opened, and the Ears of the Deaf unstopped;” that “the lame Man should leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb sing” Which Prophecy, in many Instances, was literally fulfilled in the Miracles of Christ; “The Blind received their Sight, (Matt. xi. 5,) and the Lame walked, the Deaf heard,” &c. — It was foretold that he should die a violent Death, (Isai. liii. throughout,) and That “not for himself (Dan. ix. 26,) but for our Transgressions, (Isai. liii. 5, 6, &c. 12,) and for the Iniquity of us all,” and that he might bear “the Sin of many :” All which, was exactly accomplished in the Sufferings of Christ. — It was foretold, (Gen. xlix. 10.) that “to him should the gathering of the People be,” and (Psal. ii. 8,) that God would “give him the Heathen for his Inheritance, and the utmost Parts

of the Earth for his Possession; which was punctually fulfilled by the wonderful Success of the Gospel, and its universal spreading through the World. Lastly, Many minuter Circumstances were foretold of the Messiah; that he should be of the "Tribe of Judah," and of the "Seed of David;" that he should be born in the Town of BETHLEEM, (Mic. v. 2;) that he should "ride upon an Ass," in humble Triumph into the City of Jerusalem; (Zech. ix 9;) that he should be "sold for thirty Pieces of Silver," (Zech. xi. 12;) that he should be "Scourged, Buffeted, and Spit upon," (Isai. l. 6;) that "his Hands and Feet should be pierced," (Psal. xxii. 16;) that he should be numbred among Malefactors; (Isai. liii. 12;) that he should have "Gall and Vinegar offered him to drink," (Psal. lxix. 21;) that they who saw him crucified, should "mock at him, and at his trusting in God to deliver him," (Psal. xlii. 9;) that the Soldiers should "cast Lots for his Garments," (Psal. xxii. 18;) that he should "make his Grave with the Rich," (Isai. liii. 9;) and that he should rise again without "seeing Corruption," (Psal. xvi. 10.) All which Circumstances were fulfilled to the greatest possible Exactness, in the Person of Christ: Not to mention the numberless TY-NEAL Representations, which had likewise evidently

their complete Accomplishment in Him. And it is no less evident, that none of these Prophecies can possibly be applied to any other Person, that ever pretended to be the Messiah.

To these Prophecies Christ appealed, and the Apostles reasoned from them with such Success, that they were the Means by which thousands of Jews, were very early convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; who embraced the Gospel, and lived and died his faithful Disciples. — But,

Even if the Truth of the ancient Scripture had not been supported by Miracles, and the Fulfilment of so many Prophecies; or suppose there had been no Prediction respecting Jesus Christ in those Writings; yet Christianity would have come sufficiently recommended by the splendid Miracles which were wrought by the Lord Jesus, and by his Apostles in his Name. — But further,

The Prophecies or Predictions which Christ delivered Himself, concerning things that were to happen AFTER; are no less strong Proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of his Doctrine, than the Prophecies were, which went BEFORE concerning Him.

He did very particularly, and at several Times, foretell his own Death, and the Circumstances of it, (Matt, xvi. 21,) that the "Chief Priests & Scribes

should

should condemn him to Death, and deliver him to the Gentiles," that is, to Pilate and the Roman Soldiers, to "mock, and scourge, and crucify him," (Matt. xx. 18. and 19;) that he should be "betrayed," into their Hands, (Matt. xx. 18;) that JUDAS ISCARIOT was the Person who would betray him," (Matt. xxvi. 23;) that all his Disciples would "forsake him and flee," (Matt. xxvi. 31;) that PETER particularly, would "thrice deny him in one Night," (Mar. xiv. 30.) He foretold further, that he would "rise again the third Day," (Mat. xvi. 21;) that after his Ascension; he would send down the Holy Ghost upon his Apostles, (Joh. xv. 26;) which should enable them to work many Miracles, (Mark. xvi. 17.) In all these Predictions we perceive the most exact Correspondence with the subsequent Events: by which our Lord designed to convince his Disciples, that he was, in Truth, the Messiah, "Now I tell you, (saith he,) BEFORE it come to pass, that when is is come, ye may believe that I am he." He foretold also the Destruction of Jerusalem with such very particular Circumstances, (*) that no Man who reads JOSEPHUS' History of that dreadful & unparalleled Calamity, can, without

(*) In the whole xxvith Chapter of St. Matthew, and the xliith of St. Mark, and xxvith of St. Luke.

out the greatest Obstinacy imaginable, doubt of our Saviour's divine Fore-Knowledge. The Calamity itself was to be so sudden and universal as to be compared to the Lightning coming out of the East and shining unto the West. The Sufferings of the Jews BEFORE, AT, and AFTER the Siege, were to be great beyond all Example. The Ruin of the Temple was to be so complete, that one Stone was not to remain on another; and the City was to be levelled with the Ground. All this was to take place in that present Generation. If we compare this Prophecy of Christ with its Fulfilment as related by Josephus, we shall be ready to imagine it to be a HISTORY of this dreadful Judgement, rather than a PREDICTION of the Calamity; written about forty Years before the Event. He foretold likewise many Particulars concerning the future Success of the Gospel, and what should happen to several of his Disciples: He foretold what Opposition and Persecution they should meet withal in their preaching, (Matt. x. 17;) He foretold what particular Kind of Death St. PETER should die, (Joh. xxi. 18;) and hinted, that St. JOHN should live till after the Destruction of Jerusalem, (Joh. xxi. 22;) and, that notwithstanding all Opposition and Persecutions, the Gospel should yet have such Success, as to

spread

spread itself over the World, (Matt. xvi. 18; xxiv. 14; xxviii. 19) All and every one of which Particulars, were exactly accomplished, without failing in any Respect.

Some of these things are of permanent and visible Effects, even unto this Day. Particularly the Captivity and Dispersion of the Jews, through all Nations, for more than 1700 Years, and yet their continuing a distinct People, in Order to the fulfilling the Prophecies of Things still future:

And therefore the Truth of the Christian Religion were to be tried by the Fulfilment of its Author's Prophecies alone, its Divinity, (we think,) must fully appear to every intelligent and impartial Enquirer.

If we inquire further, what Reliance is to be placed on the Testimony of the immediate Disciples of Christ, who were the 1st. Publishers of Christianity, & wrote the History of the Gospel & Epistles, recorded in the New Testament, we shall find that they were good Men of excellent Character, Men whose Lives were wholly devoted to God, & whose Conduct was influenced by the pure Precepts and Example of their Master. They cannot therefore, with any Shadow of Reason, be suspected of having endeavoured to impose on Mankind, a System which

they knew to be false. — They were disinterested, generous, and noble, — But,

They had more than their excellent Character, to prove Christianity to be a Revelation from God. They were invested with the most extraordinary Powers, to recommend them to the Notice of Mankind, and to prove the Truth of their Report, and wrought a Variety of Miracles in the Name of Jesus, to prove that they were his Servants, and that He was with them; and, tho' themselves illiterate, were yet in a most astonishing and instantaneous Manner, made capable of Understanding the various Languages of Nations, and of proclaiming to the Inhabitants of every Country, in their own native Tongue, the Tidings of Salvation. Thus they carried with them the most indubitable Proofs of a divine Mission: "God bearing them Witness both with Signs, and Wonders, and with divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost."

Their unparalleled Success in preaching the Gospel is a further Reason, why their Testimony should be credited. With no other visible Arms, than those of Meekness, Humility, Love, and the most virtuous Conduct joined with the Evidences already mentioned; friendless and unprotected they went forth and spread Christianity every where,

against

against the formidable Opposition of the most cruel Tyrants, and all their crafty Councils. The Gospel which they delivered prevailed against all the Resolution, Strength and Policy of the greatest Empire that ever existed. It triumphed over all the Prejudices of the heathen World; their Religion, Customs, Laws, Policy, Pride, Interest, Vice, and even their Philosophy united to oppose it. (*)

But further, — The Blessings which the World has derived from Christianity is a further Proof of its Authenticity. It has introduced the greatest Happiness, as well as Order into Society. It has produced Characters the most exemplary for Devotion, Zeal for God, and Purity of Life. Its Promises have been found sufficient to support the Mind of Believers under the heaviest Afflictions; and to make them exceedingly joyful, in the Hour of Death. A Religion so conducive to the Holiness and Happiness of Men, must necessarily come from Heaven;

(*) It appears from the Writers of the History of the Church, that before the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece, and Italy, the great Theaters of Action then in the World; but was also propagated as far Northward, as Scythia; as far Southward, as Ethiopia; and as far Westward, as to Spain and Britain. *By Newton's Diff. vol. II.*

Their great Success against so much Opposition can no other Way be accounted for, than by believing that they were Ambassadors for God, and that He was with them of a Truth. *Serm. CIX.*

Heaven; and Opposition to it must be exceeding sinful.

The Limits of a Discourse will not permit us to enter upon the Arguments which might be deduced from the Character of Christ, and the intrinsic Excellency of the sacred Writings, which of themselves are sufficient to prove the divine Origin of Christianity. (*) — Indeed,

Christianity, supposing it free from all Mixture of human Invention, — supposing it rightly stated and duly explained, is doubtless the most reasonable Institution in the World.

Nothing can possibly be conceived more worthy of God, on the one Hand; or more beneficial to Man, on the other.

Christianity, in this Sense, is so far from clashing with the common Dictates of Reason and Morality, that, (on the contrary,) it mutually illustrates and enforces them; it explains things with greater Clearness, and urges them more strongly upon us; adds new Sanctions to the Law, and Morives built upon Arguments purely evangelical. (**)

(*) See Note (A) Vol. v. Page 180. *There*

(**) Religion is exalted Reason, refined from the grosser Parts of it: It is both the Foundation and Crown of all Virtues: It is Morality improved & raised to its Height, by being carried nearest Heaven; the only Place where Perfection resideth.

There is a Kind of Spirituality in the Gospel which is not to be found elsewhere, adding Heat to the Light of Reason, and inspiring us with warmer Notions; it draws us more effectually to God, and gives us a Fore-taste of our spiritual Happiness hereafter.

From all which we cannot but conclude and infer, that if the Deductions of our Reason favour so strongly for the Religion of Nature, revealed Religion, as it improves the same, and adds to it Excellencies beyond it, hath by much the Advantage to recommend itself to our Choice. - If from Reason we "believe in God," from the Advantages of the Gospel, (under the preceding Confirmations of it,) we must much more readily believe in Christ.

"Ye believe in God, believe also in ME."

Though Reason teaches us much in our common Duties, yet Revelation hath a Tendency to our utmost Perfection; and is therefore a Blessing which we cannot be too thankful to God for, or careful to retain and improve under.

Sermon

SERMON CX.

On the same Subject.

John xiv. 1. "Ye believe in God, believe also
"in me."

Having already proved the Connection between NATURAL Religion and REVEALED, and shown that there is a plain Gradation, and real Union and Harmony between them; and that, therefore, every honest impartial Mind is, (as it were,) favourably pre-disposed and induced by the FORMER, sincerely to believe and practise the LATTER, I shall now state a proper Notion of Faith in general, and its Necessity, together with the Efficacy of it, when we act under its due Power and Influence.

It has often been Matter of much Surprize that so many Doubts and Disputes should have arisen among Christians concerning the Nature and Necessity of Faith; when if Men would bring an unprejudiced Mind, and a common Understanding, to the Study of the Scriptures they would soon dis-

cern

cern, not only that Faith must be the fundamental Duty of a TRADITIONAL Religion; but that there is no Difficulty in comprehending the Nature of the Christian Faith. (X)

As it was impossible that all the human Race could be Eye-witnesses of the Transactions of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, and of the Salvation wrought by Him for us, of his divine Mission, and the concomitant Circumstances of it; there was no other human Method, by which the Knowledge of them could be conveyed down to Posterity, but by HISTORICAL Tradition; and therefore, no human Method, by which it could be received, but by FAITH. — Accordingly we find that the Messiah enjoins this Faith, as the important Mean, by which his Salvation is to be conveyed; and, seeing it could not be otherwise, we shall not be surprized that so great Stress is laid upon it both by Christ and his Apostles. — Now,

If we consider what we mean by FAITH, when applied to ordinary historical Facts, we shall soon attain to a clear Idea of that Faith which is required from us.

Faith is the Assent of the Mind to any Proposition, upon the Credit of the Speaker; upon the

Serm. CX,

Testimony

(*) Faith, in Scripture, hath these several Definitions, &c. In some Places it signifies that earnest Trust and Confidence in the Power of God, to which in the Apostle's Times was annexed the Gift of working Miracles. Thus "if ye have Faith, (says our Lord to his Apostles,) as a Grain of Mustard-Seed;" (if ye have that Trust in God, that particular Kind of Faith or Dependence on him, that assured Reliance on his Power without Doubt or Wavering, required of you peculiarly, at this Time; if you have this Faith, tho' ever so small in Compassion; answerable in any Measure to your present Office and Advantages;) "ye shall say to this Mountain, remove hence to yonder Place, and it shall remove." This, was a Faith required of the Apostles at that particular Time, and of them only. Truly, in other Places, the Word, Faith, signifies the Duty of Veracity, Faithfulness, or Truth. Thus "ye have omitted the weightier Matters of the Law; Judgments, Mercy, and Faith;" Faith, (that is,) Fidelity, Truth, or Faithfulness, is the Discharge of any Trust reposed in Men. Analogous to which, it is also sometimes used for the Trust itself, or the thing committed to our Charge; thus "having then Gifts differing according to the Grace that is given to us; whether Prophecy let us prophesy according to Proportion of Faith; or Ministry, let us wait on our ministering;" (the Phrase in our modern Language is very difficult, and cannot well be understood without this Observation;) "according to the Proportion of Faith," (that is,) according to the Nature and Degree of the Gift or the Trust reposed in us, (whether it be Prophecy or Ministration or any other Office which requires Faithfulness in the Performance of it,) to let every One of us discharge his respective Duty. — Now, Another and much more usual Signification of the Word, Faith, is to denote the whole Gospel of Christ, or the Christian Religion, in Opposition to the ritual Works of the Law of Moses. Thus "the Number of the Disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great Company of the Priests were obedient to the Faith;"

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cern, not only that Faith must be the fundamental Duty of a TRADITIONAL Religion; but that there is no Difficulty in comprehending the Nature of the Christian Faith. (X)

As it was impossible that all the human Race should be Ever-wisest, Faith; (that is,) embraced the Gospel. Again, "A Man is justified by Faith, without the Deeds of the Law;" by Faith, (that is,) by the Conditions of the Gospel. And, "the Word of Faith, which we preach;" that is to say, the Doctrine of the Gospel. And indeed generally throughout all the Epistles, and in the Book of the Acts, this is the constant Signification the Word, *Faith*. And the Reason why the whole Gospel is so often expressed by that Name, is very obvious; [namely] because the great Motives and Promises of the Gospel, are the invisible things of a future State, which can be discerned by Faith only. — 4thly and lastly, In other Places of Scripture, the Word, *Faith*, signifies plainly and literally and in its most natural Sense, a firm Belief and Persuasion; a firm Belief, of the Being, and Attributes, and Promises of God. Not, (as some understand it,) a confident Credulity in they know not what, in whatever their Teachers require them to believe; and that perhaps with so much the greater Assurance, as the things are more absurd and unreasonable to be believed. Neither does *Faith* signify, (as others have contended,) a groundless imaginary Assurance, and confident Reliance on our being unalterably, we know not why, in the Favour of God. But it is a rational Persuasion and firm Belief, of his Attributes discovered by Nature, and of his Promises made known in the Gospel; so as thereby to govern and direct our Lives. Thus the Word is used "Faith is the Substance," (a substantial well-grounded Expectation,) "of things hoped for, the Evidence of things not seen." And again, "without Faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Testimony of those who relate, or deliver it."

So that Faith has its Foundation in the Authority of Testimony, and consequently will be more or less stable, according to the Ability and Integrity of the Testifier. — This is a copious Source of Knowledge to the human Mind: And the Knowledge gained by this Means, by MORAL Evidence, is not only of the most useful & practical Kind; but often equally clear and indisputable with That obtained by Sense and Demonstration. It is upon the Authority of This, upon the Credit of Witnesses, and Historical Testimony, that we believe the Transactions of former Times; of which we have no more Doubt, than of the things NOW PRESENT.

Indeed further, From the Report only of Others, of whose Integrity we have no Doubt, we readily believe Facts, - and believe without Hesitation, when confirmed in it by other Relators of Veracity and Knowledge. — Now,

This is called HUMAN Faith, as depending upon the Evidence of MAN; and is absolutely sufficient, tho' absolutely necessary for the common Intercourse of Life. — But, where Things of FUTURE Life are concerned, something MORE is required; we wish for the Testimony of God; and a Faith built upon That Testimony is called DIVINE Faith. — But,

Separate

Separate from the Testifier, the Faith, or Assent of the Mind, is one and the same in both: In Matters of HUMAN Concern, we believe upon the Evidence of MEN; in Matters of DIVINE Concern, we believe upon the Evidence of GOD. — Now,

As to Facts recorded in the Books of the Old and New Testament, they stand, without all Controversy, upon an equal Footing with any other historical Facts, and we have as good Grounds for believing the Histories of Moses, and of Jesus Christ, as we have for believing any other History or Transaction whatever: Any one Reason upon which we ground our Belief of the PAST Transactions of lesser Matters, will equally and more strongly urge our Belief of the Facts of the FORMER. (*) — But then, As

(*) Mr. Lock, (in his Essay on Human Understanding,) well observes, that "There is One Sort of Propositions, which challenge the highest Degree of our Assent upon bare Testimony, whether the thing proposed, agree, or disagree, with common Experience, and the ordinary Course of things, or not. The Reason of which is, because the Testimony is from such a One as cannot deceive, nor be deceived [viz] from God Himself. This carries with it Assurance beyond Doubt, & Evidence beyond Exception. This is called by a peculiar Name, *Revelation*; and our Assent to it *Faith*: which as absolutely determines our Minds, and as perfectly excludes all Wavering, as our Knowledge itself; and we may as well doubt of our own Existence, as we can, whether any Revelation, coming from God, be true. Only we must be sure, that it be a divine Revelation, & that we understand it right; else we shall expose ourselves to all the Extravagance of Enthusiasm, & Error of wrong Principles - -."

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As the Relators of these Facts were commissioned from God to reveal his Will, and to declare the Terms of Salvation to Mankind, they urged, and we are to consider, the divine Testimony which they offer, in Proof of their divine Mission: & if we find THAT Testimony sufficient, we are bound to believe, indeed, we cannot consistently withhold our Assent.

Thus we become Believers.

From hence we easily learn the true Nature of Christian Faith: It is not an INTERNAL Operation, or ENTHUSIASTICK Persuasion in the Mind, wrought supernaturally, without Reason, and without Evidence: (*) But the Faith which God requires, and which

(*) When we talk of, and esteem Faith, as a mere *internal Persuasion*, wrought upon the Mind, by, we know not what imaginary Agency, (inward Feelings and Persuasions, which are very uncertain, unstable and fallible,) there is no Doubt, but such a Faith may not only be groundless, but productive of the worst Consequences to Ourselves and Others.

[I shall here make a Stricture or two, upon a Definition of Faith, given by an ingenious & pious Writer. (Theron and Aspasio. Vol. iii Page 178. see also Letter 10.

"Faith, (says he,) is a real Persuasion that the Blessed Jesus shed his Blood *for me*, and fulfilled all Righteousness *in my Stead*; that thro this great Atonement and glorious Obedience, He has purchased even for my sinful Soul, Reconciliation with God, & all spiritual Blessings."

To show the Impropriety of this Definition, it might be enough to ask,

which, indeed, is indispensibly necessary to the very
Being

in what Writings, human or divine, Faith is ever understood or applied in this Sense? What Scriptures prove it? Or particularly, what Scriptures authorize any Man to make such a *personal* and *immediate* Application? No satisfactory Answer can be given; but only with great Comfort we may reason on, and conclude it. — See Vol. v. Page 139.

We may further observe, that this Definition is defective & dangerous in assigning no Foundation upon which this *real Persuasion* is to be built. — “A real Persuasion”! — We might, we ought to inquire, from what Evidence? Here rests the great Delusion: If it had been said, “upon the external Revelation of God in the Gospel,” we might have acquiesced: but it is to be conceived, it was not so meant, since we can produce Passages from Writers of this Opinion, that this *real Persuasion* is drawn from “*no external Testimony*,” but from the *internal* and *immediate* Operation of the Holy Spirit.” (Wesley’s Sermons Vol. 1. page 6.) What an Inlet to Enthusiasm & Error This is, surely we need not be told.

We remark further, that what is here defined to be the *Whole* of Faith, is only *One* Branch of it; for Faith is a *real Persuasion* not only of *One* or *More* Propositions in the Revelation of God,; but of *All* the Propositions contained in it: It stands generally, in the New Testament, for the *Complex* of Christianity, in Opposition to the Law, which stands as generally for the Complex of the whole Mosaical Dispensation. — Now, because Christianity is a federal Religion, founded on God’s Part, on Promises which He has made to us, and on the Rules which He has set us: And, on our Part, on our believing that Revelation, our trusting in those Promises, and our setting ourselves to follow those Rules. — Faith, therefore, must receive the *whole* Gospel, The Precepts as well the Promises of it; and receive Christ as a Prophet to *teach*, and a King to *rule*, as well as a Priest to *serve* us: It branches itself into several Parts, some of which are in themselves actually lifeless and ineffectual, and therefore will not *serve* our Turn.

Being of a Christian, is, a full Assent of the Mind to the

The true and generous Notion of Religion, is, that it is a System of many Truths, which are of such Efficacy, that if we receive them into our Minds, and are governed by them, they will rectify our Thoughts, & purify our Natures: and, by making us like God here, will put us in a sure Way to enjoy him eternally hereafter.

It will bebove us, then, to search out that lively & efficacious Faith, by which we have Assurance that "the Just shall live."

Suppose us, then, possessed of what Divines call an *Historical* Faith, which is a speculative Knowledge of, and a bare Assent to, Facts, and some other Matters, related in Scripture: Suppose we believe that such & such things were transacted, as we are there told of, that Jesus Christ lived, suffered, and rose again, and that he had a divine Commission; Will This do? - We believe "there is One God;" Is This sufficient? No: for "the Devils" themselves do as much, they also "believe all this, and tremble at it." If this Faith be not backed by exalted Acts of Virtue and Obedience, it is an inanimate Carcase, a Body without a Soul, fruitless and ineffectual. — If further, to this Knowledge & Assent we add also an Approbation of, and even a Joy in receiving those Revelations; if that Joy arise but from some carnal Considerations, and will not stand the Test of Consists, if it wither at the Heat of the Sun, or shrink beneath the Thorns and Briars, it then constitutes but what is called a *temporary* Faith, as useless, and more dangerous than the former. But, if we give our Assent only to certain Propositions which appear so evident, that we cannot well refuse it, and withhold it from every thing else which does not bring such Demonstrations with it, or at least does not come within the narrow Limits of our Comprehension: This is, at best, but a *partial* and imperfect Faith; or rather, indeed, is wholly undeserving of that Appellation, ("Faith being the Substance of things hoped for, the Evidence of things not seen.") The incredulous Thomas could not think to make a Merit of believing that his Master was risen, after he had both seen and felt him, for That afforded an Evidence of Knowledge and Conviction.

We

the Truths revealed in the Gospel, grounded upon
the

We must search deeper, then, for that meritorious and efficacious Faith, which is to recommend us to God; for by neither of these must we hope to live. If "the Just shall live by Faith," it must be such a Faith as is *just* in itself; a Faith by which we rely on God's Word and Promises, for that very Reason only, because they are His Word and Promises; by which, with the most submissive Deference to infinite Wisdom, we receive all the Commands of the Almighty, and, without presuming to scan them by our weak Capacity, let ourselves only upon endeavouring faithfully to obey them. — In a Word, *just* as it is

The Faith, which is the Foundation of Virtue, is a firm Reliance upon the Promises of God; for the Enjoyment of a blessed Immortality, made known to us by the Revelation of the Gospel; procured thro' the Righteousness, and ascribed to us by the Resurrection, of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is the true Faith of a Christian; to which all the great and precious Promises of the Gospel belong. All other intermediate Acts of Faith are subordinate to This, which is the ultimate End and Perfection of the Gospel; and they have no Value; but as they lead to, & center in, this great and operative Principle of Religion. For although we believe Jesus to be the Messiah fore-told & described in the ancient Prophecies; tho' we believe him to be the eternal Son of God; whose Power was made manifest to the World in Signs & Wonders & mighty Works; tho' we receive the Gospel as an authentic Relation of his Life and Words and Actions; Yet if these Acts of Faith did not open to us the Prospect of everlasting Life, and direct our Views and Hopes towards the Happiness of Heaven, our Faith would be a mere speculative Assentment in Matters in which we had no Concern, and from which we could receive no possible Advantage. The ultimate Faith of a Christian, therefore, is that which terminates in the Promises of God, and the Glory which is hereafter to be revealed.

From all which it appears, that this Definition is extremely defective,

the Evidence which God Himself hath given.

This

give, and we may add, in many Cases, ill-grounded. They, therefore, who take their Estimate of Faith from it only, will come far short of the Truth. — Let a Man only consider what it is to be an infidel, and what to be a Christian; and he will be fully satisfied in this Matter.

Upon the Whole, — We are infallibly to Believe what God has promised; especially, that he will give Pardon of Sin, and everlasting Salvation to all humble and repenting Sinners; and, for what refers to our own particular Case, we are confidently to rely upon his Word, that if we perform Our Part, Christ will never fail in his; and therefore, we ought to fulfill those Duties, which he commands; and to which alone this Promise of Reward is given. — This we are undoubtedly to assent to; — But then,

For the particular Application of this Faith to Ourselves, That deserves no more of our Assent, nor can we indeed warrantably have it, than what is founded on the serious Consideration of our own Performances. — Tho' our Consciences, therefore, bearing Witness to our Sincerity, may give us great Cause to hope we are in a State of Salvation; yet, it is no Part of any Man's Faith *undoubtedly* to believe it. (See vol. ix. page 195. &c. — Nay, rather,

Some Degree of Fear and Trembling, mixt with it, may be a good Means to secure us in our Duty; whilst a confident Dependence is very often ill grounded, and may create such a Negligence as will certainly ruin us. (See Vol. vi. page 547.)

Let our Endeavours, therefore, be to fulfil God's Commandments, to repent as often as we fail in it, and to hope for Pardon and Acceptance with him.

Infinite Reason we have for all This, and This will be sufficient for our present Comfort, and for our future Acceptance. — But,

If still, either the Greatness of the Danger, or Glory of the Reward; either our Desires of becoming better, or a true and humble Sense of our own Unworthiness, (which is almost the perpetual Case

This is that Faith which God requires of us, and which is necessary to give Virtue to every Act of Man. (*) Indeed,

It has been said, that the best Actions that were ever done by any Heathens deserve no better Name than that of *splendid Sins*: What shall we say, then, of the seemingly good Actions of those, who are destitute of that Christian Principle from which every Christian Virtue proceeds. (*)

Faith (of the best Persons,) keep our Souls under an Awe and Concern, and will not suffer us to rise up to that Confidence which some Men, I fear unwarrantably, *themselves* pretend to; I am sure, unwarrantably require of *others*: Let us assure ourselves, that whilst we firmly acquiesce in the general Belief that God will reward all them that love him, and doubt of ourselves only, because we fear whether we do This as well as we ought, This Doubting will prepare us to receive the Reward of our Humility; but never bring us in Danger of any Punishment for our Infidelity. — (See the Discourse on groundless Doubts and Scruples, in this Work.)

(*) An Action is called *Good*, from the Morality and Nature of the Action itself, whether of Justice, Charity, or the like; whatsoever the Doer of them may be: But Actions are considered by God with Relation to *Him* that does them, in another Light; his Principles, Ends, and Motives, with all the other Circumstances of the Action, come into this Account; for, unless All these be good, let the Action, in its own abstracted Nature, be ever so good, it cannot render the Doer acceptable or meritorious in the Sight of God. — What was never intended for God, will never be put to God's Account; nor accepted by him as such.

(*) See the XIII Article of Religion.

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Faith in God, and a true Belief in Christ, and the great Doctrines of his Gospel, are the first in Order to make Men religious; and without which Faith, even Religion itself, (could we suppose it in every Branch,) would profit us nothing. — For,

The great End which God designed in his written Word, by his Prophets and Apostles, and by the sending his Son, was, to banish Infidelity, and to implant Faith on Earth. — We should, therefore, be careful to improve under these Advantages.

The Ignorant and Superstitious may weakly triumph in a Religion which proceeds not upon rational Principles; but it is the Glory of Christianity, (as we profess it,) to be the Friend of Reason; and to be able to say unto Wisdom, “Thou art my Sister.”

It is only a rational Belief in God, & in Christ his Son, in our Minds, that can in any Way avail us.

A credulous and implicit Faith will make us, neither wiser nor better. In Order to constitute a TRUE Believer, we should know upon WHAT Foundation our Faith stands, and be able to assign a Reason for our Belief in God, and in Jesus Christ his Son, the Saviour of Mankind, & the consequent Duties flowing from thence. — It is for Want of this, that we see so many professing Christians un-

stable

stable as Water," "carried to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine." Whilst Others contentedly acquiesce in the Profession they were born, and lead Lives of total Indifference to Christ, because they never examine the Truth of their Religion: And this, (among others,) is one great Reason why the primitive Christians so much excelled us in the Purity and Holiness of their Lives and Conversations, because they were rooted and grounded in Faith.

They took not up their Religion on Trust, and were not Christians merely because their FATHERS were such, but they embraced the Faith upon the maturest Examination of its Evidence, and upon the fullest Conviction of its Truth and Dignity. (*)

But,

(*) It is usually the first Care of a Man who is born to, or becomes otherwise possessed of an Estate, to inform himself by what Kind of Tenure he holds it, and to be thoroughly versed in every Particular of his Title; that he may be able to defend himself should the Matter at any Time be brought into Dispute: A Step so highly prudent and necessary; that whenever we see a Man remit in This Particular, we justly look upon him as an Idiot, or an Extravagant, and conclude that he is either unqualified for making such Enquiry, or that he has no Regard for his Right of Inheritance.

In the first Case he would have a Title to our Compassion; in the second he justly merits our Contempt; and yet, this is too general a Case in a Matter of much greater Moment, than that of Riches or the most extensive temporal Concerns; and it is too apparent that there

But, — As to many of Us, we should have been Infidels upon the same Principles that we are now Christians,

are too many Persons in both Sexes who have called themselves *Christians* for half a Century of Years with almost as little Sense of the Meaning of the Word, as our common domestick Animals have of those arbitrary Names our Caprice imposes upon them; and who have valued themselves on the Right of a joint Inheritance with the Blessed Jesus, without ever enquiring on what that Right was founded, how it might become forfeit; and what Methods were necessary for its Defence and Support.

This Negligence, (strange as it is in such a Concern,) is unfortunately too general; nor can we readily determine to what Principle to ascribe it, or where to fix its Foundation; since it is not unusual to meet with it in Men much superior to the common Level, as well in Point of Genius as Education; the *great Man* is too often in This Respect but upon an Equality with the *meanest*; and he who can run thro' the several Branches of Literature, with the most happy Elegance both of Thought and Expression, is here as silent as tho' he were a Stranger to the Principles of Language and Reasoning; however lively and brilliant the Understanding; however solid and discreet the Judgement may be in all other Cases; yet there reigns a most deplorable Ignorance, and Stupidity in religious Concerns; a Folly in those Respects which their greatest Wisdom in others cannot balance.

This Indifference, in a Point of so much Concern, we would willingly ascribe, in general, to Levity and Want of Consideration; but, whatever be the Ground of it, we would wish the Man who knows himself guilty in this Respect, to consider seriously how dreadful it must be to have the Principles of a Religion which he has pretended to profess for a long Series of Years, first taught him at the Bar of the Last Judgment, when the most hearty Assent to those long neglected Truths will be of no further Avail, than to extort from him his involuntary Assent to his own just Condemnation.

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Christians, had we been born of Heathen Parents. (*)

But, — A Profession thus without Faith, thus without Principle, (i.e) without a due Knowledge in the Grounds of God, Christ, and our Duty, can by no

The sole Method by which a Man may effectually secure himself from that Hazard, is, to take the Opportunity of Life, Health, and vigorous Faculties, frequently to "examine himself whether he be in the Faith."

He that falls into Error for Want of Care and Diligence to find out the Truth, can have no Pretence to Pardon. — We are as much bound to know our Duty, as we are obliged to practise it. — And, in the Search of Truth, it behoves every Man to preserve a philosophical Liberty, not to be so enslaved to the Opinion of any One, as to think whatever he says, infallible; but to exert his own Reason, and judge for himself, with the Advice of Friends, and the Assistance of sacred Writ; a too servile Submission to the Books and Opinions of the Ancients having spoiled many an ingenious Man, and plagued the World with Abundance of extravagant and absurd Notions. If we set aside those Cases in which Reason is concerned, a Man ought to measure his Studies and his Books by the Standard of his own Reason, and not to enslave his Reason to his Books; for, as there is no Man, but what may draw great Supplies and Advantages from Learning, so there are very few who do not find great Prejudices from the Notions they acquire by Studies, except they use them, as if they were natural to them.

(*) Religion is universally rather *inherited* than *taught*; the Generality of Men embrace it as a Part of their Fate, the Temper of their Clime, or the Entail of their Ancestors; The Reason why they are Christians, is because Christianity had the Chance to bespeak them first; Had Mahomet plied them as early, they had as much Faith for the Alcoran as the Bible.

Serm. CX.

no Means be acceptable & well-pleasing to God. (*)

For, — It is only such a Faith as is embraced upon good and solid Reasons, (which is the only true

(*) The Reasons why *Believing*, (which in other Cases, is a Matter of Indifference, of Prudence; or Understanding only, and not of Morality; yet,) in the Case of Religion is so highly esteemed, are, because, in *practical* Matters, it is an Act, not of the *Understanding* only, but partly of the *Will* also, to attend and be willing to submit to reasonable Evidence; to lay aside the Prejudices of Lusts and Passions; to suffer Reason and Argument to prevail over worldly Interests; and to embrace a Doctrine of Truth and Right, merely upon the Evidence of its being such, without Regard to temporal Considerations. *Believing*, in Matters of strict Demonstration, is an Act, not of Choice, but of Necessity. In Questions of uncertain Speculation, it is a thing merely indifferent, neither good nor evil, or, at most, a Part of Prudence or Imprudence only. But in Matters of *Practica*, to Believe and be guided by Reason and Evidence, not by Inclination and Passion; as it is the most proper and natural, so it is one of the most commendable and excellent Actions of a rational Being. Hence in Scripture, the singular Commendation given the Bereans, (Acts xvii. 11.) is founded upon This, that "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so or not." And the high Encomiums bestowed upon Abraham's Faith is upon this Ground, (Heb. xi. 19,) that he "Accounted," (the Word in the Original is, he Reasoned within himself, & was satisfied,) "that God was able to raise up his Son Isaac again, even from the Dead." And our Saviour's Approbation of the Canaanitish Woman, "O Woman, great is thy Faith," was occasioned by her arguing reasonably, that as "even the Dogs eat of the Crumbs that fall from the Children's Table," so she, though an Alien from the Commonwealth of Israel, yet might hope for some small Portion of Blessing from the Messiah, who was sent into the World by the com-

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true faith,) that is to be relied on (*). A true justifying Faith, according to Knowledge, is Faith that will both enable us to discover Truth, and will influence us to live according to it.

Let

non Creator of All Men. And the extraordinary Character, he gives the Centurion; "I have not found so great Faith, no, not in Israel," was upon This Account that he *reasoned himself* into a Belief of Jesus Power to heal at a Distance, by considering that even he himself, although a Person infinitely inferior to our Lord, yet had *Servants* under him, so that he needed not to go in his own Person, but could "say to This Man, Go, and he goeth, and to another Come, and he cometh." The particular Commendation given to these Reasons Faith, was, that it was not a rash Credulity; but a *reasonable, confident, & well-grounded* Belief. And accordingly the Scripture, in other Places, directs us to "try the Spirits, whether they are of God," and exhorts us to "be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asks us a Reason of the Hope that is in us," And the *Sluggard*, on the contrary, who considers nothing carefully, is justly reproved for being "wiser in his own Conceit, than seven Men that can render a Reason," God himself, in his Dealings with Mankind, appeals to them by the Prophet, to "consider and show themselves Men;" "The Lord has a Controversy with his People and he will plead with Israel," And, "Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord," He expects of them, a *reasonable Service*, founded upon a just and *reasonable* Belief; and Both these, are the proper and most commendable Acts of *reasonable* Creatures; weak, credulous, and implicit Faith bringing neither Glory to God, nor Honour nor Benefit to Men; but is rather an Offence to the former, and to the latter a real Disgrace, as being the Dregs and Weakness of human Nature.

As I was hired a Soldier of Christ in my Baptism, so now I declare myself a Volunteer in his Service; what was *then* done without my Knowledge, I *now* ratify by my free Consent, and I resolve not to change my Banner as long as I live."

Serm. CX.

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(*) "Having put in the Balance, and weighed the Protestant Religion with all others that are extant, I now make That the Object of my Choice, which before was only the Effect of Reposection; and, as I was lifted a Soldier of Christ in my Baptism, so now I declare myself a Volunteer in his Service; what was then done without my Knowledge, I now ratify by my free Consent, and I resolve not to change my Banner as long as I live." Sermon CX.

Let us, then, suffer the things of Religion, and of Christianity in particular, to have their due Weight upon us: Let us diligently and impartially consider these Matters, and not suffer ourselves to be biassed by Prejudice, Passion, or Interest, to a contrary Persuasion: - Let us improve our Talents, and exercise our Understandings in an honest, sincere and diligent Search after Truth: - Let us contemplate with Reverence the Perfections of the Deity, and frequently call to Mind what we ARE, and what we OUGHT to be, and what Reason and Revelation do jointly require from us: - Let us consider the great End of our Creation, and the Sentence that will await us in the Hour of Decision. By attending to Subjects of this Kind, our Affections will be gradually weaned from the Objects of Time and Sense, and we shall, in some Degree, sustain with Propriety the exalted Character of being the Rational and immortal Creatures and Sons of God.

Thus much, at least, we may with Reason desire of Men; for, though we cannot believe what we will, yet we may, if we will, consider things seriously and impartially, and yield, or withhold our Assent, as we find Reason for it, after a careful Search and Examination.

If any Man will offer a serious Argument against any

any of the Principles of Religion, and will debate the matter soberly, as One that would gladly be satisfied, he deserves to be heard. — But,

He who turns Religion into Raillery, and attempts to confute it by bold Jest, makes not Religion, but himself ridiculous, because he sports with his Life. (*)

It concerns every One; therefore, who would not trifle away his Soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable Misery, seriously to enquire into these things

(*) Probably the Reason why many Men, who are sufficiently *all in other Matters*, yet can talk profanely, and speak against Religion with some Kind of *Smartness*, is, because Religion frets them; their Consciences are disturbed and galled by it, and that makes them rise against it, as if they had some Spirit in them. But, with *Three things* it is not good to jest with, [*viz*] — God, — Death, — and the Devil: for the First neither can, nor will be mocked; — the Second mocks all Men, one Time or other; and the Third puts an eternal Sarcasm on those who are too familiar with him.

He must be a very wise Man that knows the true Bounds & Measures of Fooling with Respect both to Time, Place, Matter, Person, &c. — But Religion, Business, and Cases of Consequence, must be excepted out of that Sort of Liberty. — *Non patitur Ludum Fama, Fides, Quæque* — Wickedness in Jest, is *real* Impiety.

Religion and Virtue, in all their Forms, either of Doctrine or Precept, of Piety towards God, Integrity towards Men, or Regularity in private Conduct, are so far from affording any Grounds of Ridicule, that they are entitled to our highest Veneration; they are Names, which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost Honour.

Questions in Jest need no serious Answer. See Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

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things; and patiently and impartially to consider the Arguments brought for them.

We should think that we have not now the making of things true or false: The Principles of Religion are already settled before we examine them.

The Truth of things are already fixed; either there is a God, or no God; our Souls are immortal or they are not; the Scriptures are a Divine Revelation, or an Imposture; One of these is certain and necessary, and cannot now be altered. These things will not comply with our Conceits, nor bend to our Interests. — And,

If, upon Enquiry, we are convinced, (as every honest Heart must,) that it is the greatest Reason and Prudence to believe there is a God and a future State, and that the Scriptures are the Word of God; then, let us meditate much on these things. Let us attend to the proper Consequences of such a Persuasion, and resolve to live as becomes those who believe them.

Let us labour to strengthen ourselves in this Belief, because Faith is the Spring of all rational Actions, and the Root of all other Graces; according to the Strength and Weakness of which, our Holiness, Obedience, and Graces, will for ever flourish or decay.

Faith

(*) Devout Exercises of the Mind, on the Perfections, the Providence, and the Grace of God, together with the Obligations we are under to Piety and Virtue, have been the Business and Pleasure of good Men in all Ages of the World; and our own Hearts will tell us that nothing can be more becoming our rational Nature than a devout Attention to Subjects of such infinite Excellence in themselves and Importance to us: frequently meditating on such Subjects, tends to wean our Heart from the World, & disposes us to ap-

[under]

proach

Faith has a natural Tendency to good Works; our Belief in God, without this, cannot be called Faith. — For,

Some Sort of Infidelity is at the Bottom of every Sin; and, in every wilful Transgression of God's Law, our Assent to, or Persuasion of, his Being, must be either very weak or imperfect, or really wanting in us, at the Time we do amiss.

To believe, therefore, in God, in its utmost Latitude, imports, that we rightly understand and assent to what the Scriptures have revealed concerning Him; and to conduct our Lives accordingly.

Where true Faith is, there will, of Necessity, be also a suitable Life and Conversation; for, "with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness." A right Faith, we all know, is the Foundation of all Religion; but, That which perfects the Act of Believing, is, a suitable Manner and Way of Living; our Knowledge and Belief must not be a bare Speculation, but a serious, practical, affecting Impression, and deep Sense upon the Mind, producing its proper Effects; [viz] Righteousness, and universal Obedience. Whereas, there has prevailed in modern Times a very different & ENTHUSIASTICAL Notion (*); as if Faith, under the Gospel, was nothing but

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Serm. CX.

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Let us labour to strengthen ourselves in this Belief of the Divine Majesty, in public Worship, with more real Devotion. It enables us to taste some of the Sweets of Religion, and so practise it, and we should therefore particularly employ ourselves in it on the Day of Rest, (the Sabbath,) more immediately set apart for it. The Gospel, like the Productions of Nature, will improve upon the Trial; the Application of the Microscope to Nature, and Meditation by Faith to the Gospel, will always show fresh Beauties and Attractions.

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Serm. CX.

but a confident Reliance upon the Merits of Christ, to do all that for us, which He, on the contrary, expressly requires that we should do for ourselves.

When we have thoroughly endeavoured to obey the Commandments of God, and have performed our Duty really and sincerely, tho' very imperfectly, to rely THEN upon the Merits and Intercession of Christ for the Acceptance of those imperfect, tho' sincere Endeavours, This is indeed the Duty and Comfort of a Christian; but it is not what the Scripture usually calls Faith. (*)

Faith is That firm Belief of things at present not seen, - That Conviction upon the Mind of the Truth of the Promises and Threatnings of God, made

known to all men, and known to all Christians than *Faith*, but it is to be feared there are many who do not understand what is meant by it. Every different Sect has an Explication of this Doctrine peculiar to themselves; which, unless every other Person submits to, cannot, in Their Opinion, please God, or attain to Happiness in the future World; Every different Revolution in the Christian Church has produced its different Creed, notwithstanding the Apostle has affirmed that to Christians there is but "One Lord, and One Faith."

(*) The Definition of Faith, in the New Testament, is two-fold: Sometimes it is taken for the Belief and Persuasion of the *Doctrines* revealed by our Saviour, or that particular Revelation, which he gave of the Will of God - The Other Meaning is very obvious, (viz) a Belief of those great Truths revealed by our Saviour, and principally of his *divine Mission*, with the numerous Consequences that follow from thence.

known in the Gospel, of the certain Reality of the Rewards and Punishments of the Life to come, which enables us, in Opposition to all the Temptations of a corrupt World, to obey God in the full Expectation of an invisible Reward hereafter.

This is THAT Faith, which in Scripture is always represented as a moral Virtue; indeed, as the Principle, Root, and Spring of all others; because it is an Act, not of the Understanding only; but also, and chiefly of the Will; so to consider impartially, to approve and embrace the Doctrine of the Gospel, as so make it the great Rule of our Life and Actions. By this Faith it is, that we must be justified, and by This it is, that the Ancients, whose Example, as recorded, is so celebrated in Scripture, obtained, (as the Apostle expresseth it,) a good Report. The Faith of Abraham (*) was, that "he looked

(*) The Faith of Abraham is eminently distinguished, indeed, he is called the Father, [viz] the Pattern and Example, as well as the Leader of all the faithful: and therefore we find his Faith more largely described in the sacred Scriptures, than that of any other Person. The Reason is obvious; God designed to shew us in Him the true Nature of Faith, of that Faith which would ever be acceptable to Himself. Now, if we turn to the fourth Chap. of the Rom. and upon attentive Perusal of it, we shall find Abraham's Faith to have been exactly What we have attempted to delineate: "He was justified by his

looked for a City which hath Foundations, (even the heavenly Jerusalem, spoken of in the Prophecies,) "whose Builder and Maker is God."

The Faith." - "His Faith was reckoned to him for Justification," ver. 3. (for so *Δικαιοσύνη* should be rendered all thro' this Chapter; and not *Righteousness*, as we read it; a Mistake, which has introduced the Term of "*imputed Righteousness*," which is obnoxious, unscriptural, and leads to many pernicious Errors.) St. Paul goes on in the following Verses to inform us, what Sort of Faith *this* was, which procured Abraham to great a Blessing. And we find, that it was an unfeigned & thorough Assent to what God had revealed to him. He founded his Faith on things *humanly impossible and incredible*, upon the Veracity & Power of God; being unquestionably assured that God had promised, he believed without the least Doubt or Hesitation. "Against Hope he believed in Hope, &c. . . He was strong in Faith, - He gave Glory to God, being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform." - Now,

Let us apply This to the Christian Faith, and as we are led to do by St. Paul, who tells us, that if we bring to God such a Faith, (as was This of Abraham's,) in the great and fundamental Truths of the Gospel, particularly the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, This Faith will be reckoned to us for Justification. He mentions the "Death and Resurrection" of Jesus, as all Truths of the Gospel stand connected with those two main Pillars.

If we believe these Truths, (being all of them fully confirmed to us,) as Abraham Believed God's Revelation, we have a Faith like Abraham's, and like him shall be justified, and saved, if walking in the Steps of his Faith.

Abraham was, *with his own Hands*, to sacrifice his Son Isaac, where, by the Law of the Burnt-Offering, then known to Abraham, and afterwards published to Israel, "his Throat was to be cut, his

Body

The Faith of the Other Patriarchs, was, that "confessing themselves Strangers on Earth," they declared plainly, that they "sought a better Country, (i.e.) an Heavenly." The Faith of Moses, was, that he chose rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season: for he had Respect unto the Reward, and endured, as seeing him who is invisible." The Faith of the Martyrs, was, that they chose to be "tortured, not accepting Deliverance, that they might obtain a better Refurrection."

This is a very easy and intelligent Notion of Faith, and such as shews plainly that Faith is not a more SPECULATIVE Act of the Understanding, but a SUBSTANTIAL, PRACTICAL, MORAL VIRTUE, fruitful in every good Work. — Indeed,

Whether we respect the Nature of Faith, in general, or particular, a little Reflection upon the Springs and Principles of human Action, may serve to shew, that Faith, being a firm Persuasion of the Truths
 Body divided into Quarters, his Bowels taken out, and burnt to Ashes. That Faith that could surmount these many Difficulties, and readily and cheerfully rest upon God in the Discharge of such a Duty, no Wonder it was so honoured by God, and celebrated by all Men: indeed, even by the Heathens, who have translated this History into their Fables.

Truths contained in the Gospel, is the first in Order, the Foundation, the Cause, and Root, fitted to produce all other Christian Virtues, as its proper Fruit, and genuine Effect: It is no where inculcated to the Exclusion of other Duties; or invested with a Power to render all the rest superfluous. Nothing can be so opposite to the manifest Tendency of the Principle itself; as to intrench Ourselves here; and, utterly unconcerned about all further Improvements, embrace it with a Resolution of confining it within the narrow Limits of This general Principle. The Reason that makes it necessary, is not that it excludes and invalidates all the Rest, It is the very Reverse of this; because it naturally leads to them, and unfolds itself in a Variety of dependent Duties, which rise upon it and follow from it by a natural Connection. It is indeed the true Fountain of living Waters; but, we deprive ourselves of its Benefits, if we suppress the Streams, and Fountain. It is destined to fill a thousand Channels, to diffuse itself thro the whole Extent of our Minds, and to enrich them with a perpetual Increase of divine Knowledge, in Order to Practice. Far from giving Countenance to a Suspense, or Relaxation of our Endeavours after higher Attainments, it makes our Improvement in revealed Knowledge and

and Advancements in Virtue, as far as lies in our Power, an indispensable Duty, and will naturally effect them.

These Effects it doth not always, nor necessarily produce; for, Men are but too often negligent in exerting its Power. — Burges, (9)

They so naturally flow from thence, that, if we carefully attend to it, and duly cherish its Suggestions, it will not fail to make us in all Points the very Persons we ought to be.

The Scripture, therefore, when magnifying the Efficacy of Faith, speaks of it, as it is in its own Nature, and upon a Presumption that the Persons possessed of it, do their Endeavours to keep its Impressions always lively and strong; and, where This is done, the Inducements to Obedience will be found so powerful, and the Conditions so reasonable and necessary, that an assured Expectation of the former, will naturally draw after it a careful Discharge of the latter.

It is, therefore, of the utmost Importance to be rooted and well grounded in Faith, which is the common Principle of all Goodness.

A Principle this, so suited to the Operations of the rational Soul, and whose Influence upon our whole Behaviour is so universal, that we may say of

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its Efficacy, with Regard to the Good or Evil of our Lives, as our Blessed Saviour said of his Miracles, "According to the Strength or Weakness of our Faith, so will it be unto us." (*)

(*) See Vol. vii. Page 329, &c.

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They so naturally flow from thence, that, if we cannot be brought to it, and duly cherish us, as religious, it will not fail to make us in all Points the very Persons we ought to be.

The Scripture, therefore, when magnifying the Efficacy of Faith, speaks of it as it is in its own Nature, and upon a Presumption that the Persons possessed of it, do their Endeavours to keep its Impulse from always lively and strong, and where this is done, the Inducement to Obedience will be found to be irresistible, and the Obedience to reasonable and necessary, that an effectual Repetition of the former, will naturally draw after it a certain Discharge of the latter.

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SERMON CXI.

On the same Subject.

**John xiv. 1. "Ye believe in God, believe also
"in me."**

Having already proved the Connection between NATURAL Religion and REVEALED, and shown that there is a plain Gradation, and real Union and Harmony between them; and that, therefore, every honest impartial Mind is, (as it were,) favourably pre-disposed and induced by the former, sincerely to believe the LATTER: And also stated a proper Notion of Faith in general, and its Necessity; together with the Efficacy of it, when we act under its due Power and Influence, — What remains, is, to apply what hath been said. — And,

First, This shews, that it is for Want of Faith that there is so much of Irreligion in the World.

Men are not firmly persuaded of the Truths which they profess, neither do they suffer them to sink deep into their Hearts, in Order to their bringing forth
Fruit

Fruit to Perfection. If we did verily believe the great Truths of the Gospel, we should as certainly walk according to them; — did we, as we ought, believe in the Being & Existence of God, we should dread to offend him: — Were we fully persuaded of a future State, we should be restless and impatient till we had secured an Interest in it, by making things temporal give-place, in all their Encounters, to things eternal. — Did we verily believe in the Word of God, we should study its Precepts, in Order to obey them.

Let Men, therefore, pretend what they will, true Faith will ever be made evident by Works, and we may know them by This, as a Tree is known by its Fruits, which is always made manifest by them.

The true Cause, then, why Men in their Lives contradict the Precepts of Religion, is, because they do not rightly believe in God, nor in Jesus Christ the Son of God, nor in the Word which He preached among them; Or, (which is the same thing, only indeed, with an higher Aggravation of their Crime,) do not pay due Regard and Attention to them. If this Faith was firmly rooted and grounded in Men, they could not live wickedly; for, “with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness.”

Therefore, further, — Since a Faith and Belief in the Gospel-Truths are so necessary, that our very best Works without it are but Sin before God, and have withal so great an Influence upon Religion and Morality, how greatly doth it concern us so to strive that we may obtain it! (*) — And, the Means hereto are obvious. — As,

Frequent Meditations on the Things before us, — on the Being and Existence of God, — The Congruity of every Part of Religion, — and the Reasonableness and Equity of its Precepts and Doctrines.

Let us especially regard our future State, and its final Determinations: — And, to guide us herein, let us be especially heedful to the written Word of God, as it is peculiarly profitable hereto, that we may “be established, rooted, & grounded in all Knowledge.” (†)

Those who delight in reading Books of Controversy, which are written on both Sides of the Question in

in new Difficulties, and that generally for this Reason, because the Mind which is perpetually lost in Controversies & Disputes, is apt to forget the Reasons which had once set it at Rest, and to be disquieted with any former Perplexity, when it appears in a new Shape, or is started by a different Hand. (6)

As nothing is more laudible than an Inquiry after Truth, so nothing is more irrational than to pass away our whole Lives, without determining ourselves one Way or other, in those Points which are of the last Importance to us. There are, indeed, many things from which we may withhold our Assent; but in Cases by which we are to regulate our Lives, it is the greatest Absurdity to be wavering and unsettled, without closing with That Side which appears the most safe and the most probable.

The first Rule, therefore, which I shall lay down is this, that when by Reading or Discourse we find ourselves thoroughly convinced of the Truth of any Article, and of the Reasonableness of our Belief in it, we should never after suffer ourselves to call it into Question. We may, perhaps, forget the Arguments which occasioned our Conviction, but we ought to remember the Strength they had with us, and therefore still to retain the Conviction which

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they

(*) Controversies must be either on religious, philosophical, literary, or political Subjects. It is certain that we should never give up Truth, or temporize on any of these Subjects; but as written or verbal Controversy may be kept up without a Violation of the Law of Love, let each Party be always upon their Guard, and resolve, whatever Provocations they may receive, to keep clear of personal Reflections and bitter Remarks.

Controversies at some particular Times and Occasions may have been useful, particularly about the Time of the Reformation, and also when any important Doctrine of Revelation is violently attacked by some very crafty Adversary; in that Case, a Defence of the Truth is necessary, and tends to establish it more firmly, but these Occasions are but accidental, and will by no Means justify or recommend other controversial Writings; on the contrary, the Perusal of them usually does Injury in the following Respects; first, sometimes it produces Infidelity, for where there is no Grace, but little Learning, and great Pride, it is no great Wonder that reading so much of the many very opposite Opinions amongst some who profess Christianity should have such an Effect; edly, it often

Fruit to Perfection. If we did verily believe the great Truths of the Gospel, we should as certainly walk according to them; — did we, as we ought, believe in the Being & Existence of God, we should dread to offend him: — Were we fully persuaded of a future State, we should be restless and impatient till we had secured an Interest in it, by making things temporal give-place, in all their Encounters, to things eternal. — Did we verily believe in the Word of God, we should study its Precepts, in Order to Points of Faith, do very seldom attain at a fixed and settled Habit of it. They are one Day entirely convinced of its important Truths, and the next meet with something that shakes and disturbs them. The Doubt that was laid, revives again, and shews itself in new Difficulties, &c. (†) (Page 129. §† (†))

(*) Hope, by religious Faith, if grounded on Morality, exalts the Mind to greater Happiness than Acts of Virtue can do, without Faith: because Men may be moral; but wanting Faith, can build no Hopes on the Reward of their Virtue from the Supreme Being. See the 18th Article of Religion.

(‡) See the Advantages of Scripture, in Vol. xxii. Page 393, &c.

(†) A Transposition being made from hence into the 22d. Vol. was the Occasion of the Irregularity of the Pages here.

in new Difficulties, and that generally for this Reason, because the Mind which is perpetually lost in Controversies & Disputes, is apt to forget the Reasons which had once set it at Rest, and to be disquieted with any former Perplexity, when it appears in a new Shape, or is started by a different Hand. (6)

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 withdraws the Attention from personal and practical Religion, because when the Mind is so much engaged in Disputes, it has neither Time nor Inclination properly to attend to the spiritual Exercises of the Soul; lastly, being engaged in Controversy, (or frequently perusing controversial Books,) not only lessens our Veneration for Religion, but hurts the Temper and Affections, for an improper Familiarity breeds in Time Irreverence, and when the Mind is unhinged, and kept in Doubt and Suspense between contrary Opinions, the Temper and Affections lose their Mildness and Simplicity, and either contract Gloominess or Peevishness.

We should be furnished with Weapons of Defence, in Case of an Attack upon the Truth, but we should never take an Occasion of Controversy with any One. The Religion of the Heart generally declines as Disputes increase, and those who indulge themselves in Controversies, are leaving the Wheat for the Chaff, increasing their Enemies, and making Work for Repentance.

they once produced, (*) This is no more than what we do in every common Art or Science, nor is it possible to act otherwise, considering the Weakness and Limitation of our intellectual Faculties.

This Rule is absolutely necessary for weaker Minds, and in some Measure for Men of the greatest Abilities. But,

To these last, I would propose, further, that they should lay up in their Memories, and always keep by them in a Readiness, those Arguments which appear to them of the greatest Strength, and which cannot be got over by all the Doubts and Cavils of Infidelity. — But,

3dly, There is nothing which strengthens Faith more than MORALITY. Faith and Morality naturally produce each other.

A Man is quickly convinced of the Truth of Religion, who finds it not against his Interest that it should be true. The Pleasure he receives at present, and the Happiness which he promises himself from it hereafter, will dispose him to believe it. (†) It

(*) It is in this Manner that the Mathematician proceeds upon Propositions which he has once demonstrated, and tho' the Demonstration may have slipped out of his Memory, yet he builds upon the Truth of it, because he knows it was demonstrated.

(†) *Facile credimus quæ volumus: et, e contra, Fides difficilis quæ obstat nobis.*

It is very certain, that a Man of sound Reason can-
not forbear closing with Religion upon an impartial
Examination of it; but at the same Time, it is as
certain, that Faith is kept alive in us, and gathers
Strength from Practice more than from Speculation.

But thirdly, There is yet another Method which
is more perceptive than any of the former; [viz] an
HABITUAL Adoration of the Supreme Being, as well
in constant Acts of mental Worship, as in outward
Form. The devout Man does not only believe, but
feels there is a Deity. He has actual Sensations of
Him; his Experience concurs with his Reason; he
sees Him more and more in all his Inconveniences with-
in; and even in this Life almost loses his Faith
in Conviction.

The Last Method which I shall mention for the
giving Life to our Faith, is frequent Retirement
from the World, accompanied with religious Me-
ditation. (*)

When
(*) We cannot have a nobler Motive for Retirement, than upon
the Views of Religion; to shut up the Prospect of this World, that we
may take a better View of the other, is a prudent Provision. It is
certainly good to retreat sometimes from Company, Business, and Di-
version, to inspect our Practices, to stand Account with God, and ex-
amine our Conscience for Eternity; and for how well we are prepared
for that State of Separation. Things standing thus; we should endeavour
to disengage our Affections from the World, and to slide off from them.

When a Man thinks of any thing in the Dark-
World by Degrees; and, since the Objects of Sense will shortly fail us,

let us leave the Correspondence, and try a little, to live without them;
let us only see how lasting Fund, & subject for the greatest of Thought.

To retire for such Purposes as these, is the best Improvement of
Solitude. he who thus alone, in the Way, retires, is to the most desire-
able Company. Those who have attained to that Sublimity of Mind,
as to be above all worldly Care, tho they meddle with the World, as
being of the World, yet they do it so safely, that they cleave not to it,
nor are distressed to leave it.

Retirement from the World, therefore, is absolutely necessary for
every Individual of the Community. — Unless we devote a proper
Portion of our Time to Meditation and Reflection, Passion will surely
get the Ascendant over Reason; and we shall be imperceptibly carried
down the delusive Stream that leads to Perdition. However, therefore,
it be despised and contemned by the Trifling and Insignificant of the
present Age, it is highly commendable. — Not that we would be un-
derstood as recommending a Life of continual Solitude as essentially ne-
cessary to the Happiness of Man. This would be to invert the Blessings
and Benefits of such a State; but only a seasonable Retiring from Tu-
mult and Distraction, from Vice and Impertinence, from Vanity and
Fatigue.

Man, indeed, was not made for perpetual Solitude. — His Powers
his Dependencies, all declare against it; but, occasionally to leave the
Rushes of the World, the Temptations of Society, to retire into himself, and con-
mune with his own Heart, whether with the Prophet in his Chamber,
or with the Patriarch in the Field, is not only as pleasant, but necessary.

It is not impossible to live at Ease, to live to Heaven & Ourselves,
and yet be serviceable to our Fellow-Creatures. — Hadst we but forever
labouring under Business, struggling with Fraud and Iniquities, and
if a Portion of our Days were allowed us for Rest and Tranquillity, for
no Reprieve from Toil and Haste, for our Healths and Constitutions

show

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one,

ness of the Night, whatever deep Impressions it may
make

ons; our Comforts and Satisfaction, be given up and sacrificed to perpetual Anxieties? may we never be allowed to plead the Privilege of our Labours, sue out our Dismission, and withdraw from Fatigue?

The true evangelical orthodox Religion, published by the great Redeemer Himself, enforces and recommends Retirement from the World. Often were the silent Shade, the lonely Garden, the solitary Mountain, visited by our Saviour for Intercourse with Heaven. Solitude is the hallowed Ground which Religion has, in every Age, chosen for her own. There, disengaged from the Intrusion of the World, & the impertinent Avocations of Life, the agitated Spirits reassume their Firmness, and regain their Peace. There, sedate and composed, the Soul can contemplate on its own Excellency and Importance, and anticipate the awful Moment, when the Habitation of Mortality shall dissolve, and all the gay Pageantry of this earthly Scene vanish forever. Thoughts these that demand the Hour of Privacy and Recollection, when the Passions are all obedient to the Understanding, and even Self-Interest and Self-Love submit to the Search of Truth.

Candidates as we are for Immortality, we should often retire from the World, in Order to think seriously of the approaching Hereafter. There we may discover Truths of the most interesting Nature, which were scarcely ever heard of in the public Line of Life; and there we shall experience such tranquil Joy, such Serenity of Mind, and mental Satisfaction, as the World can never bestow. The Fruit we gather from our many Days of Company is very little. We scatter much in Conversation, and gather but small Profit: but, for the few Hours we spend in Retirement and Recollection, the Return is very considerable. When we have called off our Thoughts from worldly Pursuits and Engagements, then, (and not till then,) are we at Liberty to fix them on the best, the most deserving, and desirable of Objects, God. To study his blessed Nature and Perfections, to imprint a filial Awe of him on our Hearts, a lively Sense of his perpetual Inspection and Presence;

make in his Mind, they are apt to vanish as soon as the

sence; - to abound in all the Methods of devout Application to him, in Acts of Petition and Praise, of Joy and Wonder, of Submission and Hope, of Love and Affiance; - to open all our Wants, and impart all our Grievs to him, and to express, in the most significant Manner we are able, our entire and unlimited Dependance upon him: by often dwelling on such Thoughts and Reflections as these, we have made them familiar, habitual, and natural to us, and can have as easy and delightful a Recourse to God, in all Accidents, and upon all Occasions, as a Son hath to a beloved and loving Parent, who, he knows, is at all Times able to assist, and ready to receive him.

Can any thing refine, raise, or ennoble our Natures more than such a Conversation as this, which is thus begun, improved, and perfected in Solitude? Shall we not think it worth our while to cease for a Time from cultivating useless and perishing Friendships with Men, that we may be the more at Leisure, and the better qualified, to enter into this divine Correspondence, which is of the utmost Concern to us, and upon which our everlasting Welfare depends?

While indeed our Hearts are deeply engaged in the Concerns of this World, we cannot well relish the Pleasures of such a spiritual Commerce: but, after we have once accustomed and inured ourselves to it, we shall find it the most delightful Entertainment of the Mind of Man, and pleasing as Light to the Eyes, "sweeter than Honey, or the Honey-comb." — Sensual Men may make Sport with such a Pretence, and call it Enthusiasm, and the Product of an heated Imagination; but they that taste the Satisfaction, know it to be real, and would not part with it for all the Delights this World can afford; and which, (in the disparaging Phrase of the Apostle,) they "count but as Dung, in Comparison of the Excellency of this Knowledge of God, and Christ Jesus."

As religious Retirement is a great Means of advancing us in the Knowledge of God, so doth it assist us towards attaining a true Knowledge

the Day breaks upon him. The Light and Noise of the

ledge of Ourselves; towards searching and trying all our Ways, and getting a right Information concerning the State of our Consciences.

He that will thrive in his temporal Affairs, must often balance his Accounts, examine his Gains and his Losses, and see what Proportion they bear to each other; consider where his Conduct may have been faulty in any Respect, and how for the future to rectify it. The same Vigilance and Care is requisite in Relation to our spiritual Concerns; and we can never exert it effectually but in the Closet, where Privacy and Silence befriended our Enquiries.

When the Importunity of outward Objects ceases; when the Noise and Avocations of a troublesome World are at a Distance, we may enter upon these Searches without Difficulty, and finish them without Interruption. We may then look inward, and take a distinct View of what, at other Times passes there unobserved; of our hidden Inclinations and Aversions, of the Springs which secretly move us in all our Pursuits; of the Temptations that beset us hardest, & most frequently foil us; of the Ground that we have lost or got in our several Encounters. — The great Risque which Virtue runs in Company is from the Neighbourhood of ill Examples, which are of so contagious a Nature, that if we live much amongst them, we shall as surely be corrupted by them, as he that often breaths an ill Air, will at last partake of the Infection. It is dangerous for the most innocent Person to be too frequently and nearly a Witness to the Commission of Vice and Folly. Such Views lessen the natural Horror we have for such Actions, and render the Thoughts of them more familiar, and less displeasing to us, especially when we are used to see ill things practised by Persons whom we regard; the favourable Opinion we have of the Doer extends itself to the Action done, and leads us insensibly from seeing to approving; and from approving to imitating. And thus being, (the very best of us,) prone to do Evil, and living in the midst of Evil, being attacked thus from without, and betrayed from within, we are not capable of making an effectual Resistance. The only Refuge we

the Day, which are perpetually soliciting his Senses,
and

have is in Retreat, where we may at Leisure correct the ill Impressions that have been made upon us; and, by Disuse and Distance, weaken the Force of those ill Influences which we could not wholly avoid. We seldom mix long in Conversation, without meeting with some Accident that ruffles and disturbs us; somewhat that plays either upon our Hopes or our Fears, Aversions or Desires. An injurious or slighting Word is thrown out, which we think ourselves obliged to resent; or some innocent Expression of ours is misinterpreted and resented by others, and that provokes a Return. Our Enemy comes in our Way, and kindles Thoughts of Aversion and Hatred in us; we look upon those who are above us in all the Advantages of Life with envious Eyes, and with Contempt on those who are beneath us. Thus are we delivered over from Passion to Passion, tossed and disquieted in our Minds, during the Intercourse we maintain with the World: but, when we quit it, and retire, all these Winds are presently laid, and there is a perfect Calm. The Objects which excite us being removed, our Appetites also languish and die away; we possess our Souls in Patience and Peace, and enjoy a profound Tranquility and Rest, the Pleasure of which is great to those who are so happy as to have a Relish for it, and is enhanced by being always tasted with Innocence.

The Wounds of Conscience, (like other Wounds) tho generally received in *publick*, must always be healed in *private*, There they may be laid open and searched to the Bottom, There the raging Smart of them is best endured, and there suitable Remedies are most easily and most usefully applied: where Leisure, and Rest, and Silence, and proper Discipline, assist the Patient and promote the Cure.

I may also add that few will be found to display Prudence or Consistency of Conduct, who do not sometimes step aside from the Tumult of the Throng, to consider coolly their Circumstances and Situation. Life cannot proceed fortuitously without incurring momentary Danger. Plans of Conduct must be formed, Precautions taken, Er-

and calling off his Attention, wear out of his Mind the

port-revered, and the Probability of Future Consideration. But all these require Thought, and Thought Retirement. — Indeed,

The greater the Sphere of public Action is, the less Time we can allow ourselves to spend in these religious Exercises; but still some of it is due to them, and can only be secured by regular Care or Avocation, which will wholly exclude us from paying it. Our blessed Lord, we are sure, had very great Business to transact with Mankind, and a very short Time in which to finish it; and yet, during his three Years Conversation on Earth, we find him often exchanging the Duties of the active and public State for those of the solitary and private, "leaving the Multitude away, and going up into the Mountains, up, to pray." And we are sure that in this, as well as other Respects, he "set us an Example that we should follow his Steps."

Let us therefore retire frequently into the Wood and Desert Shade; and bid adieu now and then to the Follies and Gallies of Life; so will the Ardency of our secular Avocations be abated; Reason will regain her Empire; the World will appear in its true Light; and the invisible Regions will open to the Mind, and strike the Soul with all their Importance. There we may look on the past, look forward to the future, and by the Foundation not only for our temporal, but eternal Happiness. Disengaged from the busy Temporalities of an envenomed World, we shall have nothing to perplex our Mind; nothing to rattle the Passions in our quiet and sequestered Abode. There we may meditate on the Works of Providence, and address ourselves to our merciful Saviour, to the great Author of our Being; Contemplate on these, so charming, that they may be rather said to ravish, than allure; committing to open a Rapture upon our Souls, and put them almost into a State of Separation.

On amiable Solitude: Quiet and Repose, Calmness and Tranquillity are the constant Attendants of my peaceful Abode! How often have Kings and Patriots fled away from the Glare of Grandeur, to

the Thoughts that imprinted themselves in it, with
so

enjoy themselves in thy composed Retreat. How often do Men of the World, exhausted by Fatigue, and sick of the gay impertinence of Life, repair to thee, and lay themselves in thy downy Lap? — Thou alone art able to sooth the Mind, when agitated & overcome with the Cares of the World. — Thou alone canst direct the soul to its proper Home, and awaken those latent Suggestions, which were lost and effaced in the bustling Crowd.

The Ignis fatuus by which we are now guided, will infallibly lead us to headlong Precipices and unfathomable Gulphs, where we shall be swallowed up and lost: let us, therefore, retire, and she will lead us to the Fountain where Pleasures unfulfill'd and unmixed perpetually flow: she will open to our View a boundless Prospect of unparalleled & inconceivable Delights, which will never fade nor decay. Only let us pay her a few occasional Visits, and she will bestow on us Peace, Comfort, Ease, and Tranquility, thro' the narrow Bounds of Time, and at length conduct us safe to the Regions of consummate Felicity, & unmolested Security.

He who resigns the World, is in constant Possession of a serene Mind; but he who follows the Pleasures of it, meets with nothing but Remorse and Confusion. It must, in Reality, be a great Misery for a Man never to be his own; too much Acquaintance with Others will make us Strangers to Ourselves; the more we converse with Men, the less we can converse with our own Bosoms. — A Man secluded from Company, can have but the Devil and himself to tempt him: but he that converseth much in the World, has almost as many Snares as he has Companions. — *Ut expeditio sit ad iter, quæ nullâ Sarcinâ gravatur. Itâ plâs proficiunt Virtutis, quos a Contemplatione Turba Humanum non avocant. Ut Flumen tranquillum, absquâ Stragula placidè currit: Itâ, quiescit Vita privata Secessus sine Molestiâ. Diet consumit.* — Indeed,

Not only Religion, Virtue and Prudence, will be promoted by occasional Solitude, but a Relish will be given to the rational Enjoyments

so much Strength, during the Silence & Darkness of

the
of a pleasurable Life. An active State is exposed to many Evils, which cannot reach a State of Retirement; but it is found by the uniform Experience of Mankind, to be, upon the whole, productive of the most Happiness. All are desirous of avoiding the Listlessness of an unemployed Condition. With neither the Incitement of Ambition, of Fame, of Interest, nor of Emulation, Men eagerly rush upon hazardous and painful Enterprizes. There is a quick Succession of Ideas, a warm Flow of Spirits, and animated Sensation, consequent on Exertion, which amply compensates the Fatigue of Attention, and Chagrin of Disappointment. But then, neither the Mind nor Body can be kept in continual Exertion; and one of the most useful Effects of Action, is, that it renders Repose the more agreeable. Perpetual Rest is Pain of the most intolerable Kind. But a judicious Interchange of Rest and Motion, of indolent Enjoyment and strenuous Efforts, gives a true Relish of Life; which, when too tranquil, is insipid; and, when too much agitated, is dissipated.

Vicissitude is essential to every State of durable Enjoyment. He who has spent a little Part of his Time in his Closet, or, (with Isaac) hath "meditated in the Fields," will partake of the Gaieties of Society with fresh Delight. Tho, therefore, a continual Solitude is not recommended; yet an occasional Retreat, for these Purposes, is requisite.

Man was made for Action, and nothing without Moderation is durable or wise. Let there be a sweet Interchange of Retirement and Association, of Repose and Activity. A few Hours spent every Day by the Votaries of Pleasure in serious Meditation would render their Pleasures pure and more unmixed with Mery. It would give them Knowledge, so that they would see how far they might advance in their Pursuit without Danger; and Resolution, so that they might stand when Danger approached. It would teach them how to live; a Knowledge which they think they possess already; and it would also teach them what they are often too little solicitous to learn, how to die. See Knox's Essays No. 111. on the Pleasures of Reflection.

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the Night. A Man finds the same Difference as to himself in a Crowd and in a Solitude: the Mind is dazzled amidst that Variety of Objects which press upon her in the crowded World. She cannot apply herself to the Consideration of those things which are of the utmost Concern to her: The Cares or Pleasures of the World strike in with every Thought, & a Multitude of vicious Examples give a Kind of Justification to our Folly. In our Retirements every thing disposes us to be serious. In Courts and Cities we are entertained with the Works of Men; in the Country with those of God. One is the Province of Art, the Other of Nature, Faith and Devotion naturally grow in the Mind of every reasonable Man, who sees the Impressions of divine Power and Wisdom in every Object on which he casts his Eye. (*) The Supreme Being has made the best Arguments for his own Existence, in the Formation of the Heavens and the Earth; and these are Arguments which a Man of Sense cannot forbear attending to, who is out of the Noise and Hurry of human Affairs. The Psalmist has very beautiful

(*) Aristotle says, that should a Man live under ground, and there converse with Works of Art and Mechanism, and should afterwards be brought up into the open Day, and see the several Glories of the Heaven and Earth, he would, immediately pronounce them the Works of such a Being, as we define God to be.

beautiful Strokes of Poetry, to this Purpose, in that exalted Strain: "The Heavens declare the Glory of God; and the Firmament sheweth his handy Work, One Day telleth another: and one Night certifieth another. There is neither Speech nor Language: but their Voices are heard among them. Their Sound is gone out into all Lands: and their Words into the Ends of the World." — In a Word,

As Infidelity destroys and cuts us off from every Christian Privilege and Blessing, and from all Hope of eternal Salvation; So, — On the other Hand, Fidelity (i.e. Faith) seals to us every Promise of the Gospel. "Only through Faith it is, that we inherit the Promises;" and, "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved."

To Conclude: As Faith is the Spring of all rational Actions, and the Root of every Grace, as well as the Seal to us of every Christian Privilege, Blessing, and Hope; so let us, therefore, be particularly careful to strengthen ourselves in it, according to the Power or Weakness of which, our Holiness, our Obedience, and Grace, will for ever flourish or decay; and will only, before God, be esteemed and accounted by it.

Let us therefore get Faith, and do our utmost to

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retain

retain it; let us "get it, and forget it not;" and, in all our obedient Performances, have a particular Regard to it. — For, "Without Faith it is impossible to please God." (*)

As we have Faith, therefore, in our Lord Jesus Christ, in all things, and in the Father and Holy Spirit, and in what they have done for, and taught us, so we must be careful in all things to conform ourselves to it; for, "He only that doth Righteousness, in God's Account, is righteous." According therefore to the Extent of our Faith, so must our Works be; for, "he only is born of God, who doth the Will of his Father, which is in Heaven."

From what has been said upon This Head, evidently appears the Folly of making a comparative Opposition, (as Some have done,) between CHRISTIANITY and MORALITY. For if the great End and Design of the Gospel, is to bring Men to Amendment and Newness of Life; and Newness of Life is only another Name for the Practice of Virtue, which is Morality; it is plain there can be no other Opposition made between Christianity and Morality, than between the MEANS and the END. Much less ought true Virtue to be lightly spoken of, when compared

(*) See Note (*) Page 101.

compared with any positive ~~Obey~~, ~~or~~ ~~ritual~~ ~~Perfor-~~
~~mance~~ ~~whatsoever~~. Because This is the same ~~Ab-~~
~~surdity~~, of preferring the Means which are in Order
 to any End, before the End itself to be obtained by
 those Means.

Also from what has been said upon This Head,
 appears the Vanity of substituting any thing else in
 Matters of Religion, upon which finally to build
 our Hopes, besides the Fruits of true Virtue and
 Righteousness of Life. For if the great and ultimate
 End of the Gospel, is to bring Men to Repentance,
 and Amendment of Manners, it is evident that
 whatever falls short of this End, and proves ineffec-
 tual to it, cannot be finally "good and profitable
 unto Men." Professing the Religion of Christ is
 nothing, if Men be not thereby made BETTER than
 if they professed it NOT. Having "prophefied in
 the Name of Christ, and in his Name having cast
 out Devils, and in his Name done many wonderful
 Works," is of no Importance, if, at the same Time,
 the Person be a Practiser of those "Works of Ini-
 quity," which the Works of Christ were intended to
 destroy.

Lastly, Laying hold upon Christ," and "depend-
 ing upon him with a strong and confident Faith," is
 of no Benefit, if That Faith, which is the Root, or

Faith that ought to bring forth the **Fruit of Righteousness**, be itself misunderstood as supplying the **Want of That Fruit**, which is the only **Excellency** of the **Root** to produce.

Sermon what has been said upon this Head, appears the Vanity of substituting any thing else in Matters of Religion, upon which really to build our Hopes, besides the Fruits of the Virtue and Righteousness of Life. For if the great and ultimate End of the Gospel, is to bring Men to Repentance, and Amendment of Manners, it is evident that what ever falls short of this End, and proves insufficient to it, cannot be finally "good and profitable unto Men." Professing the Religion of Christ is nothing if Men be not thereby made better than if they professed it not. Having "promised in the Name of Christ, and in his Name having called out Devils, and in his Name done many wonderful Works," is of no Importance, if, at the same Time, the Person be a Practiser of those "Works of Iniquity," which the Works of Christ were intended to destroy.

Lastly, Laying hold upon Christ, and "depending upon him with a strong and constant Faith," is of no Benefit, if That Faith, which is the Root, or Tree

SERMON**Of the Excellency****of****the Christian Faith.**

1 Cor. i. 24. "Christ, — the Wisdom of
"God."

It is my Intention to take Occasion from hence
to speak somewhat in general concerning the Ex-
cellency of that Doctrine which our blessed Lord
delivered to the World; to shew how truly it de-
serves the Approbation of Men, and upon what Ac-
counts it is to be preferred to the teaching of any
who appeared in the Character either of Philoso-
phers, or Prophets, or Institutors of Religion, be-
fore him; For "never Man spake like this Man."

"Christ, — the Wisdom of God."

After which, I shall make some proper Reflec-
tions upon this Subject.

For evincing the great Goodness & Incomparable
Excellency of our Saviour's Doctrine, I shall first
consider what the great Design proposed by it, is;

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and

and whether this be not unexceptionably most worthy and good : and then, 2dly, shew that this most worthy and excellent Design has been prosecuted and urged by our Lord by Methods the most proper and effectual, and such as give his Institution a great Advantage above the Schemes & Institutions of Philosophers, and all the other Teachers and Instructors of Mankind. — And,

1o First, As for the Design of our Saviour's Doctrine, and the great Excellency of it, it will not be necessary to use many Words upon these Points. Whoever looks into the Gospel, will easily perceive that the great End proposed by the Author of it, is, the Reformation of Men, and the improving them in all Virtue. Our Lord himself declares, that "he came to call Sinners to Repentance," to correct every thing that is amiss in the Tempers and Manners of Men, and to engage them to an universal Purity both in Heart and Life. In another Place he says, that he "came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them;" that he did not intend, in the Religion which he was about to institute, to dissolve any of the natural and moral Obligations which were laid upon Men before his Appearance; but on the Contrary, that he designed to confirm and reinforce these Obligations, to perfect

fect the Design of the "Law and the Prophets," by inculcating the Doctrines of Piety and Virtue, and urging the Practice of them in the most effectual Manner upon Mankind. The Apostles have given us the same Notion of the Design of the Christian Institution with that which was delivered by our Saviour himself. Thus St. Paul informs us, that "the Grace of God that bringeth Salvation," by which he means the salutary Doctrine of the Gospel, "hath appeared unto all Men," teaching us, that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World." St. John declares, that "the Purpose of the Son of God's Manifestation in the Flesh," of his Doctrine and Life in this World, was, "that he might destroy the Works of the Devil;" that he might remove from among Men all Idolatry, Corruption, and Vice; and that in the Room thereof, he might plant all Virtue and Goodness among them. And the Apostle Peter tells us, that "God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us, in turning away every One of us from our Iniquities."

These are such clear and full Declarations, as leave no Room to doubt of the true Intention of Christianity. Every one that impartially considers

them must be satisfied that our Saviour designed by
 Means of his Religion to purify and reform our
 Nature, and to make Mankind most sincerely and
 universally holy and virtuous. And if it should be
 said, that besides the Reformation of Men, there
 are some other things intended by the Christian In-
 stitution, such as the instructing us in certain Doc-
 trines not discoverable by Reason, and the enga-
 ging us to an Observance of some peculiar Forms of
 external Religion; we answer, that whatever of this
 Sort is intended by it, is always in Subordination to
 the establishing the Practice of moral Virtue among
 Men, which is evidently the great and ultimate End
 of the Christian Dispensation, to which every other
 thing in it is made subservient; and therefore we
 find that both the Doctrines of the Gospel, and the
 positive Rites of it, have all a practical View and
 Tendency; and that unless the Belief of its Doc-
 trines and the Use of its Rites be the Means of in-
 fluencing us to a pious and good Life, they cannot
 be of the least Significancy. "Faith without Works
 is dead, (says St. James,) and profiteth not." And,
 from the express Declaration of our Saviour, we
 learn, that no Participation of the outward Institu-
 tions and Privileges of his Religion, will prevent
 our being rejected and condemned by him at last,
 if we have been "Workers of Iniquity." That

That the purifying of the human Nature, and the improving it in all virtuous Qualities, is a most excellent & worthy Undertaking, must be evident to every one who reflects upon it with the least Attention. For besides that this discovers the most noble and generous Sense of moral Goodness, it at the same Time confers the greatest Benefits upon Mankind, by dignifying and adorning their Nature, by exalting them to the truest Sublimity, and bringing them to the nearest Resemblance which they can have to that glorious Being whose Nature is the Original and Standard of all Excellency, & by laying the surest Foundation for their living happily in this World, & their arriving at a State of the greatest Perfection & Happiness in the World to come.

It must be owned, indeed, that this Design is not peculiar to the Doctrine of our Saviour: the promoting of moral Virtue is a thing so apparently good, the common Nature of Mankind inclines them all so much to approve of it, that there has never been any Institution either of Philosophy or Religion, that had any tolerable Share of Wisdom in it, which has not proposed this as its End.

One of the ancient moral Writers tells us, that the great Purpose to which Philosophy was directed, was the purifying and perfecting the Life of Man.

And the same thing was very evidently intended by that Scheme of Religion which was established by Moses, & which was more fully opened & explained by the succeeding Prophets of the Jews, in whose Writings we every where find, that the Matters upon which that Religion laid the greatest Stress, were, an inward Purity and Integrity of Mind, and an outward good Conversation; without which the most punctual Observation of the Forms and Ceremonies that had been imposed upon the Jews was not at all regarded.

The superior Excellency, therefore, of our Saviour's Doctrine, above that of other Instructors of Mankind, is not to be brought merely from the End it has in View, which is common to his with other Institutions; but that which gives his Institution vastly the Preference to all others, is, its prosecuting the excellent End proposed by it, by Means much more effectual and more likely to produce it than any that those other Institutions have ever employed for accomplishing it. — This is the second Point which I was to illustrate.

Tho' it is certain that the natural Powers of Men may enable them, antecedently to the Discoveries of Revelation, to form such a comprehensive Scheme of Religion as may be sufficient to direct & engage them

them to the Practice of all Virtues; though several who have had no Acquaintance, with Religion have actually formed such an Scheme; and have found the great Use of it both in the Government of their own Lives, and in enabling them to give Instructions to others for the good Conduct of theirs; yet when we consider how few of those who had no other Light than that of Nature and Reason to direct them, did ever form any thing like a rational and just Scheme of Religion, in Comparison of that great Multitude, who thro' a natural Inattention, an utter Neglect of reasoning, and even an Abuse of their reasonable Powers, wandered perpetually in Ignorance and Error as to many Points of great Consequence, having but little more Sense of Religion and the Obligations of Virtue than the Observations which they must necessarily have made upon the Frame of the Universe, however slight these might have been; and the moral and social Nature which God had given them unavoidably forced upon them; and having even this corrupted and weakened by the vain and superstitious Notions which they entertained and the corrupt Practices in which they too freely indulged themselves: when we consider farther, how the wisest Men among the Heathens, those who are universally allowed to have

made the greatest Progress in true Philosophy, remained doubtful, after all their Researches, of the Truth of certain Principles which have always a great Influence upon the Practice of Virtue, and are absolutely necessary for its Support in many Cases; and were altogether unacquainted with some Motives to it, of great Efficacy, which could be discovered to Men only by Revelation: and when we consider, lastly, how little Opportunity the Philosophers had of propagating their Notions, and how little able they were to inculcate them with such Weight and Authority, as were necessary for bearing down the Prejudices, and calming the Passions of Men, for engaging their Attention, & disposing them to receive the Truth in the Love of it, and to suffer it to produce its proper Effects upon them: when we consider all these things, which are well-known Facts, it must be evident that, for bringing about any remarkably great and general Reformation among Men, and for raising them up to that Perfection in Virtue which their Nature and Circumstances in this World will admit of, some more powerful Assistances were wanted than those which the Light of Reason and the several Powers of Nature, and the Institutions of Philosophy, did afford. And tho' the Jewish Institution afforded some

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considerable Helps and Advantages for the Practice of Virtue, more than the common Light of Nature and the Improvements of Philosophy had given; by delivering very clearly many of the most important Principles of Religion, and urging them by an Authority which was not to be disputed, and which could not but make a great Impression upon the Mind; yet it is plain that it did not give such great Assurances and Encouragements for this Purpose, as a religious Institution might have given; nor did the Jews for the most Part, after all the Advantages which they had for leading holy & virtuous Lives, arrive at that Height of Piety and Goodness, to which many, by the Benefit of a better Institution, have since attained. The comparative Weakness of the Jewish Religion for making Men holy and good, is frequently taken notice of in the Writings of St. Paul, and will be evident to any one who only considers, among other things, that this Religion had originally no other Sanctions than temporal Promises and Threatenings, that it contained no express Declarations about a future State, and gave at best but some obscure Hopes of spiritual and eternal Blessings; and that besides this inward Defect, the external Pomp of it, however necessary it might have been in the Circumstances of the Jews,

could not but have an unhappy Effect on many of them, by drawing-off their Attention from the things which were intrinsically worthy and good, & making them spend their Time and Care in an Observance of some indifferent Ceremonies; so that while they were thus amused and dazzled with the outward Solemnity and Splendor of their Worship, their Hearts were left uncultivated, and but little of the true Fruits of Piety and Virtue were to be found in their Conversations. — But now,

The Institution of our Saviour has done a great Deal more for the Reformation of Mankind, and their Advancement in Virtue than any System of Philosophy, or other Institution of Religion could ever do: it has prosecuted this noble End by the wisest and best Means that have ever been proposed for effecting it, and such as, if well improved, will most certainly and easily bring it to pass.

For the making this appear, let us consider,

First, That the fundamental Principles of Piety, and Goodness, which the Light of Nature most clearly taught, which the Philosophers inculcated, and which Moses and the Prophets delivered in their Writings, concerning the Difference between moral Good and Evil, the Nature of Virtue and Vice,

Vices and their respective Tendencies; the Being and Attributes of God, his Providence and Government of Mankind; that all these are repeated and published again in the Revelation of the Gospel, free from every Mixture of Error and Superstition, and put in such a Light as will be most apt to give them their full Force and Influence upon the Mind. And this is certainly a Circumstance of considerable Moment: for however the Evidence of these great Articles is so very strong and obvious, that not only Men of Reflection among the Heathens, but the greatest Part of them have always had some Belief and Sense of them, yet it is certain that they were held by the Generality of them, not in their genuine Simplicity, but obscured and depraved by many Errors & Follies, which were more especially blended with their Notions and Reasonings about the divine Nature & Perfections, concerning which they became "vain in their Imaginations" and took up such absurd Opinions as were the Foundation of the grossest Idolatry, Superstition, and Immorality. And with regard even to the Jews we may doubtless affirm, that whatever improved Notions, beyond what commonly prevailed among the Heathens, were delivered to them concerning the Supreme Being, they were not yet so clear and

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full as to hinder their running very easily into narrow and partial Conceptions of him, as if his Goodness was confined to their Nation, and they were the only People in the World that he had any Concern for; and as if his Presence was limited to their Temple, and no Services would please him which were not performed there; in Consequence of which, they became vain, and proud, and insolent Despisers of the rest of Mankind, and most groundlessly presumed on the Favour of God, even while they were committing the greatest Impieties.

But now, — The Doctrine of Christianity upon these first and most necessary Points, is throughout rational and pure, being the Sum of all the wisest Apprehensions which Mankind have ever had concerning them, separated from all their Mistakes, and delivered with so much Clearness and Simplicity, that must easily approve itself to the Mind, and, if digested with any Care, may be the sure Foundation of a worthy and good Conduct; particularly, the Representation which it gives us of the Attributes and Perfections of God, his Unity and spiritual Nature, his almighty Power, his infinite Wisdom and supreme and universal Dominion, his unlimited Goodness and impartial Justice, his perfect Purity and inflexible Regard to Virtue; the

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Representation; when the Gospel gives us of these
 Divine Attributes, to such as Reason must immedi-
 ately approve, and allow to be every way worthy
 of the Supreme Mind, and cannot fail to raise in all
 who seriously attend to it, the highest Veneration,
 Gratitude, and Love towards this most adorable
 and excellent Being, and effectually restrain them
 both from Idolatry and Superstition, keeping them
 steadfast in the Worship of the one true God, and
 making them to seek his Favour, only by proper
 and worthy Methods, by Innocence and universal
 Integrity of Heart and Life, which are the great
 Qualifications that he has a Respect to, and which
 alone can find Acceptance with him.

2dly, There are other Principles, of vast Con-
 sequence, for supporting the Practice of Virtue,
 which appeared somewhat doubtful to the most
 considerate Persons among the Heathens, and some
 of them even to the Jews, which are fully ascertain-
 ed and put beyond all Doubt by the Revelation
 of Christianity. Such, for Instance, are the great
 Doctrines concerning the Immortality of the Soul,
 and a future State of Rewards and Punishments;
 which, whatever solid Foundation they may have in
 Nature and Reason, were never so clear and mani-
 fest even to the Philosophers of the greatest Name,

but that they frequently discovered an Uneasiness about the Truth of them, and that they wanted some stronger Evidence for establishing their Minds in the firm Persuasion and Belief of them; & which were so sparingly delivered in the sacred Books of the Law, that the Reception which these Doctrines met with, which was indeed pretty general among the Jews, especially towards the Conclusion of their State, (though there was one numerous Sect of them which always disbelieved them,) whencesoever it was derived, could hardly have proceeded from any Notices of them that were originally contained in their Religion. — But now,

The Revelation of the Gospel “hath brought Life & Immortality to Light,” the Doctrine of our Saviour hath extricated Mankind from all the Darkness and Perplexity which they were formerly in, with Regard to a future Life, hath opened and enlarged their Prospects beyond the Grave, and given such an Assurance of another World, in which Mankind are to be inconceivably happy or miserable, according to their good or bad Conduct here, as may make all who attend to it acquiesce in a full Expectation of this other World, and remove from their Minds every Suspicion of its Reality. Such likewise is the Doctrine concerning the Efficacy of Repen-

Repentance, which, however credible it may be upon Principles of Reason, and whatever strong Hope or Persuasion several of the Heathens had of the Truth of it, seems to have been uncertain in the Judgement even of some thinking Men in the Pagan World; and much more in the Opinion of the Vulgar, if we may judge of their Notions from their Practice of endeavouring to appease the Wrath of God, and to procure his Favour, not by the Exercise of a true Repentance, but by offering one Sort of Sacrifice after another to him, and by many superstitious ridiculous Rites which were altogether impertinent, and ineffectual for this Purpose. But now the Efficacy of Repentance is one of the clearest Principles in the Christian Institution, the Declarations of our Lord & his Apostles are so express & full upon this Head, that every one who believes them & knows himself to be a true Penitent, must banish all Doubts and Fears about his being in a State of Acceptance with God, & rejoice in the sure Hope of the divine Forgiveness and Favour.

After these, we may instance in another important Principle of Religion, which has received great Confirmation in the Institution of our Saviour [viz] the Doctrine of a divine Assistance, accompanying the Endeavours of Men in Virtue: of this Assistance

it is certain that not only the Jews but the Heathens had some Notion and Expectation, for we find the Philosophers frequently hinting at it, and proposing it as a Motive & Encouragement to Virtue: but it can hardly be supposed that any of the Heathens ever looked upon it as a thing more than probable, or which the Goodness of the Deity, and his Love of Virtue, might induce him to grant to Men: whereas the Doctrine of our Saviour has made such a plain Offer, and given such a positive Promise of it, that all who seriously apply themselves to the Practice of Virtue, may depend that they will be supported in it; that God will go along with them in all their Attempts to reform themselves, and make their Endeavours successful. Now,

Whoever considers how absolutely necessary the Belief of at least some of these Principles is for promoting Virtue among Men, & the great Influence which the Belief of all of them must have upon the Practice of it, that a full and steady Persuasion of the Truth of them will fortify a Man against all possible Temptations to desert his Duty, and to make him adhere to it in the most difficult Circumstances; Whoever considers this, must see that the Institution of our Saviour, by bringing these Principles out of the Uncertainty in which they formerly lay,

and building them upon a firm Foundation, has done a most important Service to the Cause of Virtue, has provided much more effectually for its prevailing, and given it a vastly stronger Support and Establishment than any Institution ever did before.

3dly. The Religion of our Saviour has suggested some most noble & powerful Motives for engaging Men to Virtue, which are peculiar to itself; and which the World were never acquainted with before: [viz] those which arise from the infinite Love of God, in sending "his only-begotten Son," into the World, to make a Revelation of his Will to Mankind, to propose and declare the Terms of Acceptance with him, and to give us all necessary Help and Encouragement for coming up to these Terms; and from the infinite Condescension and Love of our blessed Saviour in taking our Nature upon him, and all that he acted, taught, and suffered, for recovering us more effectually from our sinful and miserable Condition, and bringing us to a State of everlasting Perfection and Happiness; and from the great Goodness of appointing the holy Spirit of God to be the Sanctifier and Guide of good Men, who is to reside continually with us, to be the Principle of spiritual Life and Joy in our Hearts, to support and comfort us in the Performance

manhood of our Duty. Whoever attends to this new and wonderful Scene of divine Love and Goodness towards Mankind, which the Gospel has exhibited to our View, may certainly find Force enough in it for filling him with all the Sentiments of the strongest Gratitude and Love towards almighty God, and our blessed Saviour, for producing in him the most cheerful and universal Obedience to their Will, for making him to abound in all the most noble Acts of Piety, and in all the Instances of the most generous and sublime Virtue.

4thly, The positive Institutions and external Rites of Christianity contribute much better to the Advancement of Piety and Virtue than those of any other Religion have ever done. Something of this sort seems to be necessary in every Religion, both for continuing and propagating the Profession of it and conveying the Doctrines and Principles of it with a stronger and more lively Impression into the Minds of Men. But the Rites and Forms of most of the Religions which have been ever known in the World, instead of serving the Interest of true Religion, and promoting what must be the End of that, have either had no Relation to this Purpose, or been unhappily the Means of prejudicing and defeating it: this is notoriously true of a great Part,

at least, of the religious Rites and Customs of the Heathens, many of which were altogether foolish and ridiculous, and several of them flagrantly immoral. Nor can it be denied, that the Ceremonies and Forms of the Jews, though originally well intended, did always, by the Multiplicity and great Variety of them, too much engross the Minds, and engage the Attention of that People, and came at last to shut out almost all solid Piety and Goodness from among them. But now, the positive and ritual Precepts of Christianity are but few, and require nothing but what is simple and easy, and are all wisely framed for securing the main End of the Gospel, and have the most direct and plain Tendency to promote it, by the Means prescribed by it: for what can be more proper to keep up in our Minds a lively Sense of Virtue, and to confirm and set us forward in the Practice of it, than to enter ourselves into the Society of Christians, and take upon us the Profession of the Gospel in an open and solemn Manner; to meet together at stated Times in religious Assemblies, for worshipping God by Prayer and Thanksgiving; for receiving Instructions in the great Duties of our Religion, and having the Principles and Motives of it strongly and affectionately inculcated upon us, and for com-

memorating the Death of the great Founder of the Gospel, and the Benefits which we obtain by his Appearance in the World.

These Institutions are manifestly calculated for raising pious & good Dispositions in the Hearts of Men, & we cannot attend to them with Judgement and true Devotion, without perceiving the great Benefit and Use of them, in subduing our irregular Desires and Inclinations, in preserving us in a divine Temper, and making us more expert and active in every Part of our Duty.

Lastly, The Institution of the Gospel is completed, and perfectly fitted for the Purpose of reforming Mankind by its divine Sanction, or the Confirmation which it receives from the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles. The Religion of our Saviour in this Respect stands at least upon a Level with the Institution of Moses, and the Doctrines of all the most famous Prophets of the Old Testament, and has a mighty Advantage above the Institutions of the ancient Heathen Legislators & Philosophers, whose Doctrines and Precepts did indeed, by their own Light and Evidence, insinuate themselves into several inquisitive and free Minds, but for Want of proper Methods to propagate them, and a proper Authority to enforce them, could never make any Progress

Progress among the main Body of Men. Indeed the Generality of the World have naturally so much Levity and Inconstancy of Mind, and for the most Part labour under so much Prejudice and Corruption, that it is very difficult to fix their Attention even on the most noble and important Objects, and so bring them so far as to hearken to a Doctrine which is perfectly pure and holy, and much more to make them heartily consent to it, and live under its Power and Influence; so that whoever attempts to instruct and reform them, and would expect any great Success from his Endeavours, must find, if he can, some more powerful Means of engaging their Attention, and influencing their Minds, than the wisest and justest Reasoning which he can use with them will be.

Upon this Account it was that the Lawgivers among the Heathens endeavoured to found their Institutions upon the Authority of a divine Commission, which they knew was a thing that would naturally strike the Minds of Men, and procure the greatest and most universal Reverence to their Instructions and Orders. Now, what they falsely pretended to be, and for the most Part so weakly, that none of any tolerable Reflection was ignorant of the Deceit, our Saviour proved that he really was

he shewed himself to be a divine Teacher and Law-giver, by performing, and enabling his Apostles likewise to perform, such mighty Works in Confirmation of his Doctrine and Precepts, as carried the plainest Marks of the Interposition of Heaven. and which no Man could be supposed to do, "except God was with him;" which Circumstance must make a great Impression on the Minds of all Men, and give a full Conviction, if any thing at all will, even to the most prejudiced and inconsiderate, of the Truth of his Religion and the Obligation of his Law, and of the great Danger of rejecting and disobeying it.

In this Manner has our Saviour carried on and perfected the great Design of his Religion: thus has he laid a sure Foundation for our practising all Virtue, and afforded us incomparably the greatest Advantages for this Purpose, that were ever granted to Mankind; Our Understandings he enlightens by his Word; our Wills he rectifies by his Holy Spirit; and to our Affections he addresses the most powerful and engaging Motives; and if this Institution is not effectual to engage us to Righteousness, it is hardly to be expected that any thing will be sufficient to do it. The Gospel has done every thing that is requisite in a rational and moral Way for
operating

operating upon the Minds of Men and determin-
ing them to Virtue; and if after all they will, thro
a perverse and vicious Disposition of Heart, resist
the Force of its Principles and Motives, the same
will very probably make them resist all other Means
that can be used for their Reformation and Amend-
ment. Our Saviour indeed offers no Violence to
the Frame of human Nature; he does not, by mere
Force, compel those to live well, who are obstinate-
ly resolved upon the Contrary; but he has omit-
ted nothing, that was proper to be proposed in a
wise Institution, for recovering Men from their Sins,
and excising them to all Piety and Holiness; he
has laid down such excellent Principles, he has in-
culcated such strong Arguments, he has offered us
such great Assistances for engaging us to our Duty,
and he has confirmed all with so high an Authority,
that if we heartily believe his Religion, and live
under its Influence, it will undoubtedly be the
Means of raising us up to the highest Degrees of
Goodness that in this World we can attain to. The
Christian Religion has heretofore been very remark-
able for producing all Manner of Virtue in those
who sincerely embraced it; and more especially up-
on its first Appearance, when it was better under-
stood, and more firmly believed than it usually is

at present, it was famous for the Success which it had in raising up vast Numbers from the lowest and most degenerate State, to be eminent Examples of all good Dispositions and Actions. And there is certainly the same Efficacy in our Religion that ever there was for reforming the Hearts and Manners of Men, if they be but careful to improve it, and willing to be governed by it. And if we are not reformed by it, the Fault is not to be charged upon the Gospel, which is an Institution every Way fitted for obliging Men to Holiness, and improving them in it, but upon ourselves, who do not comply with the Design of this excellent Institution, nor suffer it to have its proper Influence upon our Minds and Conversations.

I shall now conclude with two or three Reflections upon what has been discoursed.

1. The Consideration of the excellent Design of Christianity, and its great Use and Efficacy for supporting the Practice of all Virtue, may most justly recommend it to the Esteem and Affection of Mankind.

2. There is certainly no Man who has any Nobleness and Generosity of Mind, and any Regard to the Interest of Men, and who knows how much their Happiness depends upon the Purity of their Hearts,

Hearts, and the Integrity & Goodness of their Conduct, but must heartily approve and value an Institution which contributes so effectually to the Reformation of the human Nature; and the adorning Men with all excellent and worthy Qualities. The Praises which have been bestowed upon the wise Institutions of the ancient Legislators, & the Schemes of the Philosophers for restraining the evil Passions of Mankind, and engaging them to the Love and Practice of Virtue, are much more evidently due to the Institution of the Gospel, which greatly surpasses every other Institution that has been known in the Plainness and Simplicity of its Doctrines, the Certainty and Efficacy of its Principles, the Excellency of its Motives, and in every Circumstance that has any Influence upon the moral Conduct of Men. We do not say, that the excellent Design and Tendency of the Gospel is sufficient to prove it to be strictly a divine Institution; for the establishing this Point, we must likewise bring in the Consideration of the Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of our Religion, which are a direct and solemn Attestation of its Divinity, and in which Christ showed himself to be not only the Wisdom, but the Power of God also; but surely not One, who is really a Friend to the Cause of Virtue and the Interest of

Mankind, can ever be an Enemy to Christianity, if he truly understands it, and reflects upon its most wise and useful Tendency. The intrinsic Goodness of the Gospel, if it had nothing else to recommend it, is a just Foundation for our entertaining a favourable Opinion of it, and wishing all Success to it in the World, that it may become the Object of every Man's Attention, and the Rule by which he directed his Behaviour. And if this once becomes the Temper of any One with Regard to the Christian Institution, we need hardly doubt but that a serious Inquiry into the Credibility of those extraordinary Facts, which support and confirm it, will make him fully acquiesce in the Belief of its Truth and divine Authority.

2dly, We should be very thankful to God for the Christian Religion, and the great Advantages which it gives to us for leading holy and virtuous Lives.

It is a distinguishing Instance of the divine Mercy towards us, that we live under this last and most gracious Dispensation of God to Mankind, which has afforded them such vastly better Helps for forsaking their Sins and performing their Duty, than were ever given to the World before; by Means of which we can attain to Virtue, and the Rewards of it, at a much easier Rate than good Men who lived

lived under either the Law of Nature alone, or any former Dispensation of revealed Religion could have done. Our Saviour told his Disciples, that the ancient Patriarchs, and the Prophets and other holy Men under the Jewish Dispensation, earnestly desired, and would have greatly rejoiced in those clear Discoveries and Revelations of the Counsels and Will of God, and the great Doctrines of Religion which he made to the World; but it pleased God to reserve them for the peculiar Blessings of those who have lived since the coming of his Son, and the Promulgation of the Gospel; which was designed to supply the Defects of all former Revelations and Institutions, and to give Men the utmost Advantages that they will ever attain to in this World for becoming holy and happy. When therefore we are Partakers of these great Benefits, we must be extremely insensible, if a grateful Impression of them does not always remain upon our Hearts. How should we rejoice in the Light which shines among us! And how should our "Souls magnify the Lord, the God of our Salvation, who hath visited and redeemed us, and hath raised up for us a mighty Salvation," that we may escape from all the Snares and Temptations of our spiritual "Enemies, and serve him without Fear, in Holiness

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ness and Righteousness before him, all the Days of our Life."

3dly, Let us be careful "to depart from Iniquity," and to abound in all Virtue and Holiness.

If this is ever to be expected from any Men, it is certainly to be expected from the Professors of Christianity, who cannot indulge themselves in the least Degree or Instance of Wickedness, without going contrary to the whole Design and Aim of their Religion, and breaking thro' all the Ties which can have any Force upon reasonable Creatures and moral Agents. Those who are in the most unhappy Situation for doing their Duty, who have their Lot in the darkest and most corrupted Parts of the World, have still so much Power, and so many Advantages from Nature and the common Dispensations of Providence for performing it, that they may be justly said to be "without Excuse," whenever they neglect it: but what then must be the Case of those Christians, who, by being instructed in the Doctrines and Principles of the Gospel, have had all the Opportunities and Advantages as well as Obligations that any Men can have, for becoming good and virtuous, and notwithstanding continue impenitent and wicked? They are plainly the most guilty and inexcusable of all Men, and dis-

cover

never such a strong Brub to Vice, & Heart so thoroughly possessed with the Love of it, and so entirely under its Dominion, as must render them most hateful in the Sight both of God and Man.

If we would, in any Sort, answer the Obligations which Christianity hath laid upon us, and make a proper Improvement of the Helps which it affords us for the Practice of Virtue, we shall not only keep ourselves innocent and free from every prevailing Sin, but endeavour to become remarkable for all good Qualities; we shall not content ourselves with any small Attainments in Virtue, but be always forming ourselves upon the Example of Almighty God, and be in a continual Progress towards the Perfection of Goodness: we shall consider ourselves as designed, (according to our Saviour's Similitude;) to be the "Light of the World;" as Persons who are to diffuse an enlivening and salutary Influence, and set a bright Pattern to all around us; who are to adorn Religion, and recommend it by our Conduct to the Approbation and Love of Mankind. This will be "to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called," and "to have our Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ;" to make our Practice bear a Conformity to our Notions, and the Principles by which we profess to be governed.

This is the only Way in which we can make our Profession of Christianity turn to any valuable Account to us. When our Character of Christians is no more than a Name, it may indeed serve for a Mark of Distinction, and furnish us with Matter of Talk and Disputation, and perhaps sometimes be useful in promoting some low worldly Designs; but except it be accompanied with a proportionable Behaviour, it will be so far from advancing our spiritual Interest, and increasing our future Happiness, that with regard to these we must suffer very greatly upon the Account of it. "To whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required," and, in Consequence, "the Servant who knows the Will of his Lord, and prepareth not himself, neither doth according to his Will, will be beaten with many Stripes."

Sermon

Evil like those of other Men? Does not the latter generally prevail? **SERMON** — does not the same Love and Excess of every Kind; does not the same Love of the World, of its Honours, Pleasures, & Riches, as much rule in the Hearts of Men, and produce the same Overflowings of Uncharitableness, the same Rapine, Violence, Fraud, Treachery, as was seen in the World before Christianity had a Beginning?

On Examination of

right Faith in Christ.

2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Examine yourselves whether ye are in the Faith."

In stating the Advantages of the Christian Religion above those of natural Religion, we usually insist, and justly, upon the Purity and Perfection of its Precepts, and on the superior Force of those Motives by which it engages and enforces our Obedience; from both which, taken together, we might expect the most exemplary Purity and Sanctity of Manners to be the prevailing Character among Christians. But when we look out for this happy Effect we are to be filled with Wonder and Disappointment; and are at a Loss to conceive how the Lives of Christians can be so little answerable to their Professions. For in what are they generally better, or what do they more than others? Are not the Lives of Christians a Mixture of Good and

Evil like those of other Men? Does not the latter generally prevail? — Is there not as much Impiety, and Excess of every Kind; does not the same Love of the World, of its Honours, Pleasures, & Riches, as much rule in the Hearts of Men, and produce the same Overflowings of Ungodliness, the same Rapine, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery, as was seen in the World before Christianity had a Beginning?

This Reproach, which is brought upon Religion by its pretended Friends, we are sure to meet with in the Mouths of its Enemies, who have with Art and Malice improved it even into an Argument against its Truth. — But,

It is obvious to observe, that they who make this Objection are usually in the Number of those who minister the most Occasion for it. And we may with Confidence assert, that the best and most virtuous amongst us, if there are any that excel in Virtue, that have kept themselves unsported from the World, and have served the Lord with a perfect Heart, will thankfully ascribe the good whereunto they have already attained, and rest the Hopes of persevering, and reaching at last the high Prize of their Calling, to the Grace of God in the Lights, Assistances, and Motives of the Gospel.

But

But the Faith itself, as it is here stated, we may hope is quite otherwise. It is certain that, as a Rule of Life, nothing from Heaven can come more perfect, more worthy of God and Man, than the Christian Institution. And it is plainly impossible that Men, who always act from some Motive or other, can in any Degree believe the Obligations of Duty, with the Promises annexed to it, without being in some Degree the better for it. In Fact, when this Faith was first offered to the World, when the Truths of Religion were believed upon Examination and Conviction, its Influence was generally seen and acknowledged.

The first Christian Apologists insist openly and in the Face of the World on this Fact, — that when Men became Converts to the Religion of Christ, their Manners, Tempers, and Dispositions, were changed & reformed; they were, (as it were,) born again; & became new Creatures. And for this we have the Authority of Enemies as well as Friends.

One of the Heathen Writers, whose Office led him to inquire into their Behaviour, reports to the Emperor who was their Persecutor, that he found nothing observable among Christians but their singular Charity, Piety, and Innocence of Life.

Another, who valued himself upon his Proficiency

by In Philosophy; and his Hatred of Christianity, & who was himself invested with the imperial Authority, commends their Piety to God, and Benevolence to Men, to the Imitation of those of his own Religion; & thought it the best Way to keep down the rising Credit of Christianity, to adopt the Customs and rival the Charity of Christians, by erecting beneficent Foundations, of which they had given the first Example to the World.

And tho' the Influence of our holy Religion may have decreased in the later Ages, yet surely there are numerous & shining Instances in our own Times of the same Piety, Charity, Temperance, Meekness, and every other Virtue for which the Gospel was at first distinguished.

If then our Christian Faith have lost its Influence, may it not be doubted whether this Faith is to be every where found where it is pretended or professed? If it produce not the same Effects which it did in the first Christian Worthies, is it, are we sure, the same Faith in Kind and Degree which theirs was? May it not be doubted whether the Faith of many in the Gospel-truths be any thing more than a negative suspended Assent, inclining to neither, but halting between two Opinions; whether it be not a superficial transient Principle, floating only

on the Surface, and that has never taken Possession of the Mind; or whether it be not directed to Objects of little Importance in the religious Life, in Neglect of the weightier Truths of the Gospel. For true Christian Faith is an active Principle that delights in exerting itself, that is always victorious, and overcometh the World.

Of this Faith, then, if we see little Effects, it is perhaps because we see few Instances of it. With many Christians the Faith which they profess is certainly a mere Self-delusion, a false Persuasion that they believe the Truths of the Gospel, when they have scarce informed themselves what these Truths are; and much less have inquired upon what Grounds they are to be believed. At best, it is here a thoughtless unmeaning Assent, which as it comes not from the Heart, can never influence the Heart, or produce any Fruit in their Lives and Conversations. These are Christians merely because they were not born in Pagan Countries. And may they not still be said to be almost Heathens in a Christian Country, when they are often Strangers to the Worship, and have need yet to be taught what are the first Principles of the Oracles of God? — But,

Secondly, Among those who are better taught, and even those who pretend to teach others, how

many are there who point their own and the Faith of others to Objects which serve rather to amuse and dazzle than edify the Mind; who take into their Faith only the more speculative Doctrines of Christianity, or at least consider these as the chief Articles of their Belief; who spend all their Zeal in defining and explaining what Revelation hath left unexplained; and in binding their own Interpretations of Scripture upon the Faith of others?

So that if Ignorance be one Source of Corruption among Christians, Learning too has often led the Way to dangerous and pernicious Errors. How often do Men lose themselves in searching beyond what is written into the Mysteries of Christianity, without ever reflecting that these are Mysteries of Godliness; revealed, as far as they are revealed, to inflame our Piety, our Love and Gratitude to Heaven, for the great things which God and our Redeemer have done for us; to raise our Detestation of Sin, and to establish our Virtue upon the purest and noblest Principles? What Wonder then is it if these powerful Motives lose all their Influence on our Lives, when they are not considered as Motives to an holy and virtuous Life, and are made to terminate wholly in Speculation and Refinement.

Often have these Speculations led to Errors in Practice;

And since, and a Difference in Opinion only destroy-
ed that Charity, that Love of Man, which, united
with the Love of God, is the very Soul and Spirit
of the Christian Life. Often is this Charity, which
we are commanded to extend to our Enemies and
Persecutors, denied; and all the Hopes of Salvation
along with it, to all but those of the same Commu-
nion and Faith with ourselves, while we liberally
grant to these every thing that is promised, and
much more than is without other Conditions pro-
mised in the Gospel. What think ye of uncondi-
tional Election, irresistible Grace, and finished Sal-
vation, as it is called; claimed and assumed on the
one Hand; and absolute universal Reprobation, or
endless Perdition, announced as the Alternative al-
ready decreed, on the other?

Yet these are Doctrines which, though they un-
christian almost the whole Christian World, and
leave them without Hope under the Curse of God,
are believed by many sincerely pious; and I there-
fore hope sincerely good Men, who are not aware
of the dangerous Ules to which the Wicked may
pervert them, by flattering themselves and others
that they are in a State of Salvation when guilty of
the grossest Sins; or that they are inconsistent with
the Christian Doctrine of Repentance, and reduce

all the Motives of Religion, the Exhortations, Promises, and Threatnings of the Gospel, if not the Use and Meaning of a future Judgment, to nothing.

Thus our Belief and Practice are set at Variance with each other. Our Faith is divided against itself; and our Belief in some speculative Doctrines, subverts in its Tendency and Consequences all the Principles of practical Religion.

Let us then consider, in the third Place, what are the Doctrines which we are most concerned to know and believe; and what it is to believe them aright. "Secret things," (saith the Scripture,) belong unto the Lord our God." The Ways and Dispensations of Providence are locked up from our View in the secret Councils of Heaven; "But the things which are revealed belong unto us, & to our Children for ever, that we should do all the Works of this Law," (i.e.) the things which we are concerned to know, are the things which are clearly revealed. And the Ends or Reasons for which they are revealed, and those for which we are required to believe them, are the same; namely, that they may influence our Practice, that we may be induced to do all the Works of the Law; that we may be led to attend to, and practise the Duties of Religion. — Now,

The

The things which we are most concerned to know, are certainly the End and Destination of Man, that Life and Immortality which it was one great End of our Saviour's coming into the World to bring to Light by his Gospel, together with the Duties and Means by which to prepare and fit ourselves for this Life and Immortality. These things are of the highest Moment and Importance to us, etc. (as we might expect from the Wisdom and Goodness of God,) revealed in the clearest Manner; in which therefore we are bound with the fullest Assurance to believe. The only conceivable End, and as well the declared Design of Religion, is to lead Men by a Life of Holiness or sincere Obedience here, to Happiness hereafter. To this End all its Precepts, Doctrines, and Instructions, manifestly tend. Our Saviour came to call Sinners to Repentance; to "purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works." The Scriptures are given to make "the Man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good Works," and to teach us that "by patient Continuance in well-doing, we must seek for Glory, and Honour, & Immortality." If then the End of Faith is Practice, those Doctrines are of the first Importance in our Belief which have the most practical Influence on our

Lives; that "without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord;" that "the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God;" that "if we will enter into Life we must keep the Commandments;" that "the Wicked shall go into everlasting Punishment, and the Righteous into Life eternal." — These are some of the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity; and these there are no Doctrines of more Consequence to engage our Attention; none more clearly revealed to command our Assent. To hold fast our Profession in these without Wavering, is one of the first Duties of Faith. To question or controvert these, to espouse Doctrines which enervate or evade the Force of them, is to incur the Guilt of a more dangerous Heresy than that of opposing any of the more speculative Doctrines of Christianity.

I mean not to pronounce indiscriminately all those to be Heretics who, in their Lives or Tenets, deny these practical Truths; because in the Ideas which is usually affixed to this Character is implied an open Profession and Attachment to erroneous and dangerous Opinions, and a Zeal to propagate them in the World; whereas there are few so hardy as to avow their Unbelief of the practical Doctrines of Christianity. But if there are any who decry the practical Precepts or moral Duties of the Gospel, or depreciate

depreciate the Character of Righteousness, Holiness, and Sanctity, which it holds out to our Imitation, whose Principles supersede the Necessity of good Works, of Obedience, and a holy Life; or who make the Life of a Sinner consistent with the Hopes of the Gospel; this is, (more or less, in its several Degrees,) the most dangerous Heresy that can be embraced or taught.

Here then we have a Rule to judge by, and which the unlearned and ignorant Christian may apply when his Faith is in Danger of being misled, or when unnecessary Fears and Scruples arise in his Mind, "whether he be in the Faith." If we are called to believe in Matters of doubtful Disputation, their being doubtful and not clearly revealed is itself a Presumption that they are not of the first Importance to be believed. We may be less solicitous about them; and if our Conscience condemn us not for an evil Heart of Unbelief, may have Confidence towards God that we have all the Faith that is necessary and essential to Salvation. If we are careful to do the Will of God, and impartial in our Inquiries after Truth, we shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God or of Man. If they tend in any Degree to loosen the Obligations of Morality, to flatter the Sinner into Security, or to

substitute any thing in the Place of real Righteousness; we ought to reject them, as contrary to the general Tenor of the Gospel, and to those Truths which are most clearly revealed. (*)

If any Passages of Scripture, taken separately and by themselves, seem to bear a different Aspect, or lead us to question the Obligations here mentioned, our Faith in these leading fundamental Truths ought not still to be shaken. We must and ought to suspect that the Meaning of them is mistaken; and shall assuredly find that, when considered and taken in their whole Connection, they will admit and require a very different Construction. The Word of Truth, which is always according to Godliness, cannot be at Variance with itself. And sooner shall Heaven and Earth pass away, than one Tittle of these plain and awful Truths shall fail.

St. Peter hath told us that there are some things in St. Paul's Epistles "which are hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own Destruction." And we learn from St. James, that this Apostle's Doctrine of Justification by Faith without Works had been miserably mistaken and perverted to a dangerous Use even in his Time. And if there were those Difficulties and dangerous

(*) See 1 Tim. vi. 3. &c.

Mistakes in the early Times of the Apostles, when the Language in which these Epistles were written was generally understood, and the different Occasions upon which they were written may be supposed to be better known; how much must these Difficulties be increased to the unlearned of the present Times? and how carefully guarded should they be against being misled by such Interpretations of doubtful Texts of Scripture, as are of dangerous or only suspicious Tendency?

It remains yet to be considered, in the last Place, what the Duty of Faith in the great Articles of Religion implies; or when we may be said to believe them aright.

I have mentioned two Sorts of Reasons for believing the Truths of the Gospel: the One is, the Evidence of these Truths themselves, or the natural Grounds upon which we believe them; the other is, the Moral Reason or final Cause; the End, Design, or the Use of believing. The former of these Reasons will prevail alike for the Belief of all the Truths recorded in the Scriptures. The latter, derived from the Moment and Consequences of believing, will make an infinite Difference between them. Both these Reasons must co-operate in forming a true Principle of Faith in the Believer. The Import

and Intention of the Doctrine must be attended to and believed, otherwise there will be no Meaning or Use in believing.

That our Saviour Christ was born in Bethlehem, and presented in the Temple, that he disputed with the Doctors at Jerusalem, that he was baptized by John, and betrayed by Judas, and at last died on Mount Calvary, is as true as that he was the Son of the living God, invested with the divine Authority of the Father, and that when he speaks it is the Voice of Heaven; - as true as that he hath opened to us the everlasting Doors of Life and Immortality; and that he will raise us at the last Day. But these Truths are not equally the Objects of our Faith; because the first of them are of no Use in Application; and the latter are the most important of all Truths that were ever sounded in the Ears of Mankind, and the most powerful Motives to a holy Life. In the former we may be safely & innocently ignorant; but it is a very culpable Neglect not to inquire and satisfy ourselves of the Truth of the latter; and the most dangerous Infidelity not to believe them with the whole Heart.

The Doctrines which are directed to the Heart, and are designed to put the active Powers of the Mind in Motion, we must open the Heart to receive, and

and receive with that Emotion and Impression of Mind which they are adapted and intended to produce in us. The Truths which are designed to influence our Lives, we must not only believe, but adopt as Principles of Action; to be applied in the whole Conduct and Government of ourselves.

In a Word, — If we would know whether we believe aright, we must inquire of our Actions, of the Temper, Sentiments, and ruling Passions of the Mind; whether these correspond with the Doctrines we believe. The Faith which gives us the Name of Christians is one thing; and that which makes us Christians INDEED, or true Disciples of Christ, is another. He that saith I know him, as the Apostle tells us, (and by knowing Christ is in the Language of Scripture the same with believing in him,) “he that saith I know or believe in Christ, and keepeth not his Commandments, is a Liar.” In the Scripture Sense every Sinner, (whatever be the System of his Faith, whatever he believes in Word and Profession,) is an Unbeliever. “Hereby, saith our Saviour, shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one for another; if ye keep this which is my peculiar Commandment: not if ye call me Lord, and profess your Belief in my Name, but if ye keep my Commandments, and do the Will of

my Father which is in Heaven." And St. James very justly derides as insignificant, that Faith which is unaccompanied by Obedience. "Shew me thy Faith, saith he, without Works; I will shew thee my Faith by my Works."

This then is the surest Criterion and Mark by which we may judge "whether we are in the Faith." For assuredly if our Lives are corrupt and impure, our Faith is also spurious and corrupt: whatever Church we belong to, or whatever Creed we profess, "our Faith is vain, we are yet in our Sins." Whatever Hopes we may build upon the Rectitude of our Opinions, and our Zeal for the Truth, our Portion will at last be with the Hypocrites and Unbelievers.

Sermon

SERMON

Bare Belief,

Unavailableness of it.

James ii. 19. "Thou believest that there is one
"God: Thou doest well; the Devils also be-
"lieve and tremble."

The Proofs of the Being of a God strike with so
bright an Evidence upon the Minds of Men, that they
are constrained to believe, and cannot deny their As-
sent to this great important Truth. But the Corrup-
tion of Nature prevails so far; and their Affections
cleave so fast to their Vices, that they endeavour to
persuade themselves that the bare Belief of a God is
sufficient for them; and desire to rest in the Profession,
without the Practice of Religion. And,

Could they obtain this favourable Indulgence; we
should hear no more Complaints of the Difficulty of
believing; the Atheist would give up his admired Ca-
vils, and darling Objections, and would be contented
to renounce his Infidelity, if he might still continue in
his Immorality. (Vol. VII.) The

The ancient Heriticks laboured to procure this State of Licentiousness, and flattered themselves into an Opinion, that they might "believe in God," without being "careful to maintain good Works;" but serve their Sins, like the strange Nations that were planted in Samaria, "who feared the Lord, and served their own Gods." (*)

The Works of the Ceremonial Law, having been justly proved to be no longer necessary, they argued from thence against the Necessity of the Moral Law. And they concluded that Faith alone was so excellent, or even so meritorious, that they might lay their whole Strefs upon it, and needed no other Title to eternal Happiness.

To prevent the fatal Effects of this erroneous Notion, the Apostle speaks against it with a becoming Warmth, and Earnestness of Expression, and the utmost Force of Argument. He shews that "Faith without Works is dead;" entirely unprofitable, and ineffectual to Salvation; and very far prefers the Man that "shews his Faith by his Works," before him, "who shews his Faith without Works." And at length applying himself to the latter, he offers a dreadful, but certain and weighty Truth to his Consideration;

"Thou believest that there is one God: Thou dost well; the Devils also believe and tremble."

(*) 11 Kings, xvii. 33,

He commends them for believing; but tells them the Devils also do the same. And if it cannot avail for the Abatement of the Torments of Hell, it can never avail for the Attainment of the Happiness of Heaven. — That this powerful Argument may make a due Impression upon the Hearts of Men, I shall shew,

First, That the bare Belief of a God is ineffectual to Salvation. And,

Secondly, That it will serve only to aggravate our Guilt, and sharpen our Punishment. And First,

It is ineffectual to Salvation, because it is not properly a Virtue. It rests in the Mind without exerting itself, and lies dormant there, without inclining the Will to obey, or bringing the Affections into Subjection to God. And we may illustrate its Weakness and Insufficiency, by an obvious and familiar Instance.

Should a Subject acknowledge his Sovereign to have a lawful and undoubted Right to his Crown, and declare it to be his constant Opinion, and yet withhold his Obedience from him, and refuse to make the due Returns for Protection; we should certainly think his Demands unreasonable if he claimed a Place of Profit or Honour, as a just Reward of this vain Acknowledgment and empty Declaration. And we should think him yet more unreasonable, if he not only neglected his

Service; but engaged in Rebellion against him; and yet expected that the owning of his Title should be esteemed an undeniable Plea for Pardon. — And,

If the slight Acknowledgment of an earthly Sovereign falls short of our Duty to him, how much shorter must as slight an Acknowledgment fall of our Duty to the King of Heaven!

And St. James has fully illustrated the Case, in the Instance of Charity. Though we make the most specious Pretensions to that glorious Virtue, yet unless we “bring forth Fruits worthy of it, it is less than nothing, and Vanity. If a Brother or Sister be naked and destitute of daily Food, and we say unto them, Depart in Peace, be ye warmed and filled; and notwithstanding This, give them not those things that are needful to the Body; what doth it profit?” It is not Charity, but an insolent Sarcasm, and (as the Expression is in Job) “wounds the Soul” of the Needy, “and breaks them in Pieces with Words.” (*)

How fatally was the Church of Laodicea deceived, when “she said she was rich, & increased with Goods, and had need of nothing, though she was wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!”

Thus are they deceived, who satisfy themselves with believing, that there is an infinitely wise, and just, and holy God, while they offend his Wisdom, and Justice, and Holiness. (*) *Re opitulandum, non Verbis.* More-

Moreover, The barren Belief of a God is not properly a Virtue, because we are almost compelled to believe there is a God.

To assent to a well-attested Truth, is not a Matter of Choice, but rather a necessary Operation of the Mind. For Truth is its natural Object; and when it presents itself, supported by authentic Testimony, the Mind as readily receives it, as the Eye does the Light, when it springs forth from its Fountain.

We may indeed confine ourselves to a Place of Darkness; or shut our Eyes that the Light may not shine in upon them; and we may be so perverse, as to argue, that there is no such Thing as Light, that it is only a pleasing Vision, and exists only in our Imagination. But at the same Time, we cannot but know, that we obstinately confine ourselves, and suffer Violence and Torture, that we may not behold the Light.

And the same Perverseness may tempt us to reject all the Proofs of the Being of God, and guard every Passage to our Minds, that no Argument may enter into them. And whilst we suspend our Reason, and disdain to hearken to the Reports even of our Senses, we may insolently affirm, that there is no God, and attempt to laugh-away the Belief of him, as the Invention of Priest-craft, or the Imposition of arbitrary Power. But still we unavoidably know that we offer an

unnatural Violence to ourselves, and can hardly withstand the Proofs that surround us, tho' we scornfully cast them off, with the most hardened Prejudice.

We live in the midst of them; they cry unto us, whithersoever we go, and continually "put forth their Voice:" they appear "in the Top of high Places, by the Way, in the Places of the Paths;" they wait for us "at the Gates, at the Entry of the City, at the coming-in of the Doors:" they offer themselves to each of our Senses, and "meet us in every Thought."

If we "consider the Heavens," and the beautiful Order of "the Moon and the Stars," we cannot but be convinced herein; for "the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work."

If we "go down to Hell," and view the Prisoners that are "held in everlasting Chains," even these would tell us, there is a God: the Atheist himself will be there but too fully convinced; for there the accursed Spirits and the Devils themselves "believe & tremble."

If we behold the Dawning of the Day, it will proclaim his Being to us, for "the Outgoings of the Morning praise him." And when the Darkness spreads itself over us, our own Hearts assure us, that "He maketh Darkness, and it is Night."

If we think upon the Wonders of the great Deep, they constrain us to acknowledge him, "who lifteth up

the

the Waves thereof, and who maketh the Storm a Calm."

"The Time would fail me to speak of the Cattle upon a thousand Hills," the Armies of Creatures that move upon the Face of the Earth, the Swarms of Insects, and the Seeds of Plants, each of which infinitely exceeds all the Works of Art, and sufficiently proves the Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness of God.

But were there no other Creature than Man, he would himself display a World of Wonders, and effectually confute his own Arguments, while he attempted to disown his Maker. (*)

How much soever the pretended Infidel may endeavour to deface his Reason, yet it still will bear the Image and Superscription of God. And tho' degenerate Man may sink himself into the Depth of Corruption, and become little more than Dust and Ashes, yet some Sparks of the heavenly Fire will remain within him, some Token of the Deity will be left, in the Ruins of human Nature. And,

The Proofs of His Being, which we find within and without us, which attend us, "when we sit in the House, and when we walk by the Way, when we lie down, and when we rise up," are abundantly confirmed by the united Testimony of every Age and Nation.

"Ask

(*) See Vol. i. Page 238.

"Ask now of the Days that are past, which were before you, since the Day that God created Man upon the Earth," and they will tell you, there has been no Part of Time without the Knowledge of God. "And ask from the one Side of Heaven to the other," and it will tell you, there has not been any Nation or People intirely ignorant of him.

A faint and glimmering Light discovered itself in the Lands of Darknes; and though the wretched Inhabitants had almost forgotten that they were Men, yet they had not utterly forgotten that there was a God.

And the wisest of the Nations preserved the Knowledge of his Being, and valued it more than all the Improvements of their Reason. They were not so "wise in their own Conceits," as our modern Infidels; nor did they reject it, as a thing above their Capacities, or scoff at it, as a thing below them.

When the several Countries were peopled, the Knowledge of God spread itself over the World; and after the Division of Tongues, every Speech and Language ministered to the Propagation of it. And,

We may appeal even to the Atheist himself concerning the Proof of a Deity, as St. Paul did to Agrippa, concerning the Prophets, "Believest thou" these things? "I know thou believest." For,

Tho'

Tho' all other Arguments should in vain demand his Belief, tho' they press him in vain to hearken to them, yet his Fears are still an unanswerable Argument, and must and will be heard. They are so very constant and pressing, that they can never be silenced; they are so firmly rooted in his Being, that they can never be removed.

His haughtiest Laughter and Derision, is but a fallacious Shew to cover them; and his boasted Objections are no more. While he endeavours to shake the Faith of others, he cannot satisfy himself, but distrusts his own Foundation; while he attempts to destroy the Rock of Ages.

If we follow him into his Retirement, his Fears are there; if we attend him into Company, they are "there also." Whilst he admires "the Wine, when it giveth his Colour in the Cup, and moveth itself aright," a guilty Terror seizes him, that "biteth like a Serpent, and stings like an Adder."

When he buoys up his Spirits with forced and artificial Mirth, "his Countenance is" suddenly "changed, and his Thoughts trouble him."

And when he is compelled to be alone, he is a troublesome Companion to himself, being self-condemned, though he will not own the Conviction.

If we behold the Pomp of a Triumph, and see the

greatest of Infidels swelling with the Spoils of Conquest, and drawing Princes and Nobles in Chains after him, could we enter into the Secrets of his Heart, we should find Dread and Confusion there. There would need no Slave to ride in the Triumphant Chariot, no miserable Wretch to rebuke his Pride. He is himself the Slave, though he appears to be the happiest of Men. — And,

While he almost imagines that he is a God, though he denies that there is One; his Fears smite him, as “the Angel of the Lord smote” the blasphemous Herod; and his troubled Soul speaks these “bitter things” against him; “Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming.”

And the Fears of Men are just, since the very “Devils believe and Tremble.” When the Son of God appeared “in the Form of a Servant, and the Fashion of a Man, with the Infirmities of our Flesh,” and the Wants of our Nature, “in Hunger and Thirst, in Cold and Nakedness,” Legions of evil Spirits acknowledged him in that humble State, and were struck with Dread and Amazement at the Sight of him.*

And, — The last Words of the expiring Oracles which were actuated by Devils, gave Testimony to him; and when they were utterly silenced, their Silence gave a more effectual Testimony. And

(*) See Luke iv 33—36. *Discp 41.*

And those miserable Spirits that are confined in the Prisons of the Damned, do undoubtedly believe that there is a God of infinite Power, whose Wrath will manifest itself "in a devouring Fire, and everlasting Burnings." They already feel the Rod of his Anger, living in continual Misery, and expecting a continual Increase of Torment.

And knowing the Certainty of it, they shew their unrelenting Hatred to Men, by tempting them to the highest Degrees of Sin against God, and endeavouring to aggravate their Guilt and their Punishment.

They behold with a malicious Pleasure the Success of their execrable Designs; and having sown the Tares, they delight (if we may call it Delight) in observing the mighty Growth, and seeing our Vices increase and multiply,

This is the Spring of all their Endeavours, that they know there is certainly a God, whom they fear with the greatest Terror, whom they hate with a perfect Hatred, who is able to punish his Enemies forever and ever. — And indeed,

Did not the Profane themselves believe there was a God, their impious Scoffing, and blasphemous Wit, would lose its Sting and Sharpness. It would not please, were it not surprizing; and it would not surprize, if it were not terrible; and they could not think there was a God.

Vol. VII.

Were

Were the Notion of his Being really contemptible, they could not assume so much to themselves for despising it, their extraordinary Courage, and fancied Greatness of Soul, would shrink to nothing, did it consist only in ridiculing a thing of nought. — But,

To believe there is a God of infinite Majesty, wonderful in his Doings, and terrible in his Judgments; and to revile him with a daring Confidence, and render him the Subject of their ludicrous Mirth, and wanton Raillery; to despise the Multitude of the Nations for adoring him, and expose the Weakness and Cowardice of a religious Fear, and an holy Reverence; This is the heroic Bravery, the admired Master-piece of This improved Age.

Where then is the Virtue of believing, if we ONLY believe? The Impious, the Profane, the Devils, and (I may also say) the Atheists (whatsoever they pretend) do the same. We know that it is hardly possible to disbelieve that there is a God; what THEN can we claim for believing that there is One? When “every thing in the Heavens, in the Earth, and under the Earth,” is a Proof of his Being, to doubt of it, is no less foolish than impious. For to doubt without Reason, is as palpable a Token of Folly, as to believe without Reason. And a groundless Suspicion, though it may sometimes pass for Wisdom, is a manifest Sign of Weak-

Weakness. Because it is dangerous to build upon the Sand, is it therefore dangerous to build upon a Rock? How noisy is the Profession of our Religion!

If we question the Being of a God, we may as justly question whether we were born, because we know not all the Circumstances of our Birth, or cannot exactly tell how we grew in the Womb. — Or,

We may as justly affirm, that we shall never die, tho' "Thousands fall beside us, and ten thousand at our Right-hand," because we are ignorant of the Manner of our Dissolution, and cannot fully describe the Divorce of the Soul from the Body.

This then is undoubtedly certain, that the Existence of a God is so clearly attested, that we cannot but believe it, unless we renounce our Reason. But,

If we believe it just as we believe the Histories of other Times, or the Description of distant Countries; if we think it concerns us no more than the Ages that we can never recall, or the Nations that we shall never behold: it would have been heven for us, if we had never heard of the Name of God, or were really Atheists in Opinion, as well as Practice. For,

Secondly, It will serve only to aggravate our Guilt, and sharpen our Punishment.

It is as necessary to "confess with the Mouth," as to "believe with the Heart," that there is a God. But this necessary Profession of our Religion will certainly condemn us, unless it is confirmed and enlivened by our Practice. For it adds Hypocrisy to Sin; and the more we boast of our Faith, so much the louder will our Sins cry against us.

The speculative Atheist (if there be any such Person in the World) hopes that there is no God, because he has offended him. But the sinful Believer continues to offend him, tho' he knows and acknowledges that there is One. The former will not acknowledge him to be his Lord; but the latter calls him Lord, and then disobeys him. The former acts without Principles; the latter acts against them. And whilst One denies God's Being, the Other tramples upon his Perfections. (*)

We may behold a Resemblance of the Atheist in the obstinate Jews, when they spoke the Words of Ignorance and Contempt, "As for this Fellow, we know not from whence he is." And,

We behold as lively a Resemblance of the sinful Believer in "The Soldiers of the Governor, that bowed the Knee before Jesus, and then spit upon him, and smote him on the Head." Tho' he pretends to receive him as his King, yet he pays his Homage, by giving him

(*) See Vol. xvii. Page 106, &c.

"a Crown of Thorns," and his specious Declarations are no more than a solemn Mockery.

If we lay his Words and Actions in the Balance together, and allow them to be of equal Weight, yet even upon this favourable Allowance, his Religion is reduced to nothing. For if his Words acknowledge God, his Actions absolutely deny him. But it is feared that his Actions will prove to be of greater Weight than his Words; and if those are Sins, they will render these also sinful.

He declares that God is infinite in Knowledge, in Goodness, in Justice, and in Power. But yet he daily commits Abomination in the Sight of him, who discerns "the Secrets of the Heart," and observes the Rise, Progress, and Consummation of Sin.

He "lives, moves, and has his Being" through the Goodness of God, and (if you will believe his Professions) he is sensible of it; but yet he delights to grieve his Spirit, abuses the endearing Instances of his Loving-kindness, and wears his Patience and Forbearance.

He boasts of being the Servant of a just and righteous God; but yet he transgresses the eternal Rules of his Justice, and passes on from one Degree of Iniquity to another.

He knows that there is a great and terrible God, whose Power is able to destroy him for ever and ever.

and whose Vengeance he can neither escape, nor resist; and yet he trifles with the Almighty, and "treasures up Wrath against the Day of Wrath."

How vain and foolish is the Man that imagines that, the God of Wisdom will accept of his fruitless Professions.

While he imagines this, he must also think, that his Knowledge is blinder than the Ignorance of Men, his Goodness a fond and foolish Pity, his Justice an irresolute Weakness, and his Power an insignificant Terror, "bearing the Sword in vain."

Though he says of him, as Elijah in Derision did of BAAL, "He is a God;" yet certainly it is only in Derision. And while his Sins call for the Vengeance of God, he must impiously conceive, that "either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a Journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked."

His Faith is so far from extenuating his Guilt, that it renders it inexcusable. He "believes as the Devils" do, and he will also "tremble with them."

The Time will shortly come, when Pains and Diseases will take hold of him, and Death will set all its Terrors in array against him; then his Sins will compass him about; and "make his bed uneasy in Sickness." His false Professions will reproach him, and his ineffectual Belief will upbraid him.

His

will aggravate Guilt.

411

His Body will quake like the Earth at the Approaches of its Dissolution; the Rock of his Heart will be rent, and the Multitude of Vices that were buried in Forgetfulness, will "arise and come forth."

But behold him in a yet more miserable State, when the Trumpet calls to Judgment, and he is constrained to leave the dark Hiding-place of the Grave!

He will see the Judge of all the World "sitting on his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven" attending upon him. "The Books will be opened," in which his Sins are recorded in everlasting Characters, and the Sentence ready to be passed.

"The very Heavens will be on Fire, and the Elements will melt with fervent Heat;" and the general Destruction will fill his Soul with Horror. The Ministers of Vengeance will stand prepared to seize their wretched Prey, as soon as he receives his eternal Doom.

How can he stand in That dreadful Day? And whither can he fly! He needs no Witness to accuse him but himself; a righteous Judge condemns him; and Legions of evil Spirits torment him. And now he "believes and trembles;" but in vain!

Let those consider this, who pretend to believe, and yet "forget God." Let those especially consider it, who triumph in blaspheming the living God, and glory in profaning his holy Name.

Vol. VII.

Let

Let it be an Admonition to these industrious Agents of Satan, these inveterate Enemies of God and Goodness. They will find in "the Day of the Lord," (and may they not find too late,) that their admired Cavils and Objections are "as Stubble," for "That Day will burn them up, and the Angel of the Lord will scatter them;" but the Gospel of Christ is sufficiently tried, and will endure for ever.

May they "repent of their Wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the Thoughts of their Heart may be forgiven them," May they yet be sensible that "they are in the Gall of Bitterness, and the Bond of Iniquity."

And let us beseech the compassionate Jesus, by his Agony and bloody Sweat, by his Cross and Passion, and by his precious Death, to deliver us from all Blindness and Hardness of Heart, from all false Doctrine, Heresy, and Schism, and from all Contempt of his Word and Commandments.

Sermon

This was a Part of their Ministry, in which they
 required their Followers to be joined with them; and
 particularly the Apostle of the Gentiles, who was
 not only to be a Pattern of good Works him-
 self, but to use his highest Authority in exhorting
 every Rank and Order of the Young and the
 Old, the Husband and the Wife, the Master & the
 Servant, to be exemplary in the Duties of their re-
 spective Stations, and in every Part of their Conduct
 to adorn the Doctrine they preached.

SERMON

A
 good Life,
 the best Ornament
 of
 the Christian Profession.

Titus, ii. 10. "That they may adorn the Doc-
 trine of God our Saviour in all things."

The Apostles of Christ applied themselves
 to the Conversion of Mankind, principally by such
 Arguments as proved the Reasonableness and Cre-
 dibility of their Doctrine, though they asserted the
 Authority of their Mission, and that they were
 Preachers sent from God, by those Demonstrations
 of the Spirit, the miraculous Effects of divine Pow-
 er which attended their Ministry, and might chal-
 lenge the greatest Enemies of the Gospel to object
 any thing to the Morality of its Precepts; yet still
 they appeared further solicitous to enforce these Ar-
 guments with that great Commendation to the Es-
 teem of the World, a corresponding Duty in the
 Lives of its Disciples. (Vol. vii.) This

This was a Part of their Ministry, in which they required their Profelytes to concur with them; and particularly the Apostle of the Text commands Titus, not only to be a Pattern of good Works himself, but to use his Episcopal Authority in exhorting every Rank and Order of Men, the Young and the Old, the Husband and the Wife, the Master & the Servant, to be exemplary in the Duties of their several Stations, and in every Part of their Conduct to adorn the Doctrine they profess.

By this Expression of "adorning the Doctrine of our Saviour," it is obvious to understand advancing the Credit and Esteem of it in the World; behaving ourselves in such a Manner, that the Beauty of that Holiness which it prescribes may appear in our Lives: and even the Enemies of our Religion be forced to acknowledge the Power and Excellency of so venerable an Institution.

I shall endeavour to recommend this apostolical Precept to your Attention, by showing,

First, That it is the Duty of every Christian to be concerned for the Reputation or Discredit his Life may bring on his Profession.

Secondly, I shall consider what Conduct will acquit us of this Obligation, — And First,

It

It is the Duty of every Christian to be concerned for the Reputation of his Life; will bring on his Profession. For,

This Epistle is particularly directed to Titus, and in him to the Bishops and Pastors of the Flock of Christ; yet this Consideration is here rather suggested to him as a proper Argument to persuade the Obedience of those under his Care, than a special Direction to himself.

The Apostle had employed the former Part of this Chapter in prescribing the Duties which it would be proper for him to recommend to every Condition and Relation of Life; and then subjoins this, as an universal Reason for their Compliance, "that they might adorn the Doctrine of God their Saviour in all things."

He had before exhorted Titus himself to be an Example of good Works; and he is here commanded to press the same due Regularity on his whole Charge from this Consideration, that the Honour of their Religion depended upon it.

The Ministers, indeed, of the Gospel are especially required to shine as Lights in the World, because the Distinction of their Station renders their Conduct more observable; and the Presumption of their Knowledge, and the Dignity of their Office,

gives a peculiar Force and Authority to their Example : but the Light of inferior Christians is also to be visible : and as no Circumstances of Life can place a Man so far below the Notice of the World, but that his Virtues or Vices will render him, in some Degree, an Ornament or Disgrace to his Profession; so none are below the Obligation of this Precept, to promote the Credit of it. — For,

Shall we all think ourselves bound to consult the Reputation of our Friend, or our Family, and of the Laws and Constitutions of our Country; and shall the Honour of that God whom we serve, and the Religion by which we hope to be saved, have no Share in our Concern? Can we with Indifference hear the Word of God, and the sacred Name of our Saviour blasphemed; and at the same Time reflect that the Scandal of our Lives gives the Occasions for it? For, all we can say to discredit the Argument, Men do and will judge of a Religion, by the Influence it has on the Lives of its Disciples, and be inclined to think contemptibly of that Faith which has no apparent moral Effect on the Professors of it. Not all the subtle Objections of Sophisters and Rabbies, against the Truth and Credibility of the Gospel, so much prejudiced the Reception of it in the World, as the Reproach of those infamous

infamous Crimes with which they aspersed the Assemblies of Christians. And therefore the Apologists of the Church, in their Vindications, appeal not so much to the Parity of the Rules and Precepts of their Religion, as to the Innocence of their Lives; and defy the Malice of their Adversaries to produce one impure, unjust, or intemperate Person, among all who were called by the Name of Christ. "Ye are Witnesses, (saith the Apostle,) and God also, how holily, and justly; and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe; as ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a Father doth his Children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his Kingdom and Glory."

Thus was the Gospel adorned in the Innocence and Simplicity of its Infancy; and thus were they of the contrary Part made ashamed, having no evil thing to say of them. — And,

Let us not imagine that the Reasons or Design of this Precept were confined to the primitive State of the Church; or that the first Converts only of Christianity were concerned to defend the Honour of their Religion from the Detraction of the Heathen World. That Spirit of Unbelief, of Reproach & Blasphemy, which at first opposed itself to the ri-

ing of Christianity, continues still, and will always continue, to revile and persecute the Servants of Christ. Even in these Days of Security and Establishment, when the Gospel has the Defence and Protection of national Laws, have we not seen our holy Religion exposed to public Scorn, every Order of its Ministry vilified, and the Articles of its Faith not only opposed, but ridiculed? Have Examples been wanting, who have owned, and even gloried in Profaneness and Infidelity? And are we not encompassed by Multitudes, who have Hatred and Evil-will at our Sion; who watch every careless Word, every unguarded Action of our Lives; who are ready to aggravate all our Faults, to expose our Infirmities, & traduce even our Virtues themselves? And if the Number and Malice of their Enemies was an Argument to the first Christians for such a prudent and regular Behaviour as would silence their Calumnies, and procure Esteem & Reverence to the Gospel, the same Reasons should enforce this Duty on us under the same Obligations as the Apostle enjoined it on them.

Christianity, indeed, will always demand this Tribute from its Disciples. It is implied in every one of its Commands, that we should not only obey them ourselves, but use our best Endeavours to recommend

commend the same Performances to others also. And since an exemplary Deportment in the Duties of our Station, is the most probable Method to produce this Effect; to reclaim the dissolute, convert the Infidel, and win the greatest Enemies of our Faith to a Respect and Veneration for it; this is an Obligation which will never cease, but remain a necessary Duty in all Ages and Circumstances of the Church. — Proceed we then,

10 Secondly, To consider what particular Conduct will acquit us of this Obligation.

11 In general there is something lovely and endearing in every SINGLE Instance of Duty, prescribed by the Gospel: a Beauty which the most dissolute are forced to acknowledge, and the Libertine himself to applaud and admire. How irresistible then are the Charms of Virtue, when the Obedience is UNIVERSAL? When the Graces of Religion shine with an united Lustre, and no Crime can be objected to darken the Character, and sully the Perfection of the Example? — But,

I shall content myself at present to recommend the Practice of some particular Duties; of a more special Tendency to procure Respect to ourselves, and Honour to our Religion; and these are.

1. First, An extensive Love and Charity, the Bond

of Peace, and Foundation of all the Comforts of a social Life. — It is this most Christian Grace of our Religion which softens our Passions, appeases our Resentments, and extends our Beneficence to the Miseries of our Brethren; which inclines us to support the needy, compassionate the fatherless, and relieve the Tears of the Widow; which renders us the Blessings and Ornaments of the Age in which we live, and the Veneration of those which come after. And so lovely and obliging a Disposition of Soul cannot fail of endearing both us and our Religion to the Gratitude and Affections of Men. Let the fierce and implacable Spirit of Revenge be the Character of our Enemies; let them slander and traduce the innocent; let them rage, and persecute the poor and the helpless; but let it be our Glory to be pure and peaceable, ready to forgive, and easy to be intreated: compassionate to the Sorrows, and bountiful to the Wants, of our greatest Enemies. By this shall we vindicate the Honour of our Religion; by this shall all Men know that we are the Disciples of Christ.

A second Virtue I would recommend as of peculiar Efficacy to incline Men to venerable Thoughts of our Religion, is Firmness and Resolution: a Behaviour which, even in the moral Accounts of Virtue,

the strongest, merited the highest Respect from Men. And so our Institution of Life has ever furnished its Disciples with so powerful and generous Motives of Courage as the Christian, for nothing can derive so much Honour on our Religion, as, on all Occasions, to act up to the Spirit & Principles of it.

Let a Man's Pretences to Religion be never so great, and his Conduct in other Respects be never so regular, yet if he faint in the Day of Trial, if we see him shrink from an unacceptable Duty, betray the Cause of God, and prevaricate with the most approved Principles of his Conscience, is it not natural to suspect that there is so evil a Heart of Unbelief, a secret Reserve of Infidelity at the Bottom? Especially if he be a Man of any Eminence for his Knowledge or Station. One who is presumed to have formed his Principles upon calm and deliberate Inquiry, and to be a Master of all the Arguments that can plead for Religion: when such an one shall fall away, and act contrary to his most professed Convictions, with what shame and Confusion must all good Men behold the Example? (*) what Scandal must it give to the weak, and what Triumph

(*) *Quos domini Vitium suum conspicimus in se
Crimen habet, quantum major qui peccat habetur.*
See Vol. vi. Page 559.

umph to the Infidel? With what Confidence will he conclude, that either our Religion wants Arguments to convince a reasonable Inquirer, or Encouragements to support its Converts in Perseverance. On the contrary, when we see even the meanest Christian stand firm in his Duty, and hold fast the Integrity of his Profession; when we see him renounce his Interest, his Pleasure, and even Life itself, in Obedience to the Commands of his Religion; the most indifferent Spectator must applaud the Courage, the Honesty, and Sincerity of the Man; and confess the Power of that Institution, which can infuse so much Bravery and Spirit into the Souls of its Disciples.

It was the Zeal and Resolution of the first Christians; it was the Patience of Confessors, and the Courage of that noble Army of its Martyrs, that procured Respect and Honour to the Gospel; and prevailed more in the Conversion of the World, than either the Arguments, the Oratory, or even the Miracles of its Preachers.

A third Duty which will be always necessary to secure the Credit of our Religion, is a due Obedience to the Authority of our Superiors.

It was an early Objection, and too successfully urged by the Adversaries of Christianity, that it

was

was an Enemy to Civil Government; - that it pretended to exempt the Servant from Obedience to his Master, and the Subject from his Prince. And as nothing could raise a greater Prejudice against any Religion, than an Imputation of Inconsistency with the Laws & Subordination of Government; so there is no Reproach Christ and his Apostles are more careful to obviate than this.

Thus we find our Lord on all Occasions disclaiming all Pretensions to a temporal Kingdom; commanding us to render to our Governors the Obedience that is due to them: and tho' in Strictness, (as he tells us,) he might have pleaded an Exemption from the Jewish Tribute required of him, yet rather than countenance the Aspersions that would attend his Refusal, he exerted his divine Power in a Miracle to discharge it. — And,

As the same Calumny pursued his Apostles, so they were equally solicitous to clear themselves and their Religion from the Reproach of it; inculcating the Doctrine of Subjection for Conscience-sake; and, in their own Persons, submitting to the most unjust & tyrannical Inflictions from the Heathen Tribunals, And tho' it was some Ages before the Jealousies of the Civil Powers were thoroughly reconciled to the Assemblies of Christians, yet we find them at Length

so perfectly acquitted from this Calumny, that even JULIAN himself, the most implacable Enemy that ever appeared against the Gospel, reproaches his Heathen Subjects with the Fidelity of the Christians.

This was the ANCIENT, and is, (it is hoped,) yet the unforfeited Glory of our Religion. The Malice of its Adversaries has in all Ages laboured to deprive it of this Honour; to expose it to the Resentments of the Magistrate as an Encourager of Sedition; and improve the particular Miscarriages of some few into a general Charge of Disloyalty upon the whole Church. But "Wisdom will still be justified of her Children." That pure & peaceable Wisdom, which always was, and always will be the Character of the Church of Christ, will in the End refute the Aspersions of its Enemies; and the meek, the humble, & patient Servant of Christ will be found the truest Friend to Cæsar. — And;

4thly, Let us crown these Virtues with a prudent, affable, and courteous Behaviour towards all Men. It is indeed the inward Purity and Sincerity of the Heart that principally recommends us to the Searcher of Spirits: but since God has also left it upon us as a Duty to render his Service amiable to others, these external Decencies and Ornaments of our Conduct become a very important Part of our Morality.

It

It is in these, the Visibility and Example of our Virtues will chiefly consist. The great and more observable Occasions of exercising our Courage, our Justice, or our Charity, occur but seldom: but these are of daily and constant Use, to preserve a general Benevolence, and endear our common Intercourse between one another. Without this Care, our best Actions will lose much of their Influence, and our severest Virtues be often discredited with the Appearance of Evil. But how bright and lovely does every Grace of our Religion shine when adorned with an humble and obliging Behaviour? beautiful as a Jewel set in Gold; which, though it adds little to the intrinsic Value, yet improves the Lustre, and attracts the Eyes and Affections of the Beholder. And therefore the Apostles of Christ have not failed to make it a constant Part of their Instructions to their Converts, to avoid all Unfeignedness and Asperity of Carriage; to do nothing that may argue a peevish or froward Spirit; not rendering Railing for Railing; but contrariwise, to be gentle & condescending; to be modest and unassuming, in Honour preferring one another: to be tender and compassionate, to weep with them that weep, and to rejoice with them that do rejoice. In general, to be studious of the Peace and Interests

of our Neighbour, and endeavour an affectionate Deportment, to leave Impressions of Esteem and Benevolence on all we converse with; "whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, any Praise, to think of these things."

Our Duty only must be too valuable an Interest to be given up in a Compliment, or sacrificed to the Applause of Men. If indeed we thus please Men, and can be persuaded to any criminal Compliances to avoid their Resentments, or engage their Favour, we cannot also be the Servants of Christ. There are proper Occasions, on which we may be angry without Sin. Somewhat of Warmth and Severity will become us when we rebuke the Vicious, and discountenance the Prophane; and we are expressly required to appear with Zeal and Earnestness, when we are contending for our Faith. But these Duties may be complied with, without offending against that Gentleness prescribed by the Gospel. We may reprove the Libertine, without Rudeness or Bitterness; defend the Articles of our Faith, and resist those who oppose them, with a Meekness and Humanity, which will equally convince the World of our Affection to the Persons, & our Zeal against the Errors, of our Brethren. But if passionate and unreasonable

reasonable Men will, notwithstanding our best
Care, be offended with us for doing our Duty;
God and all good Men will applaud our Integrity,
and Shame and Contempt will be the Portion of
our Enemies.

Let me, then, in Conclusion of this Discourse,
exhort you seriously to reflect on the great Engage-
ments we are under to assert the Honour of the
Religion we profess, by an exemplary Practice of
the Duties here recommended. Let me address
you not only as Christians, but as Members of the
purest and most apostolic Church in the World; a
Church, whose Doctrines are derived from the clear
Fountains of the Scriptures; whose Polity and
Discipline are formed upon the most uncorrupted
Models of Antiquity; which has stood unshaken by
the most furious Assaults of Popery on the one
Hand, and Fanaticism on the other; has triumphed
over all the Arguments of its Enemies, and has
nothing now to contend with but their Slanders
& Calumnies. The Reproach of Immorality is in-
deed a Charge that will always lie heaviest against
an established Religion; because those who have no
Religion will generally profess themselves of that
which has the Encouragement of the Law. But it
is surely very unreasonable to infer any thing to the

Disadvantage of any Church, from the Practice of those who are really of no Church nor Religion at all. But whatever Title we may have to this, or any other Excuse, let us rather endeavour to want none. Let us strive to vindicate the Honour of our Religion, by a pure and unspotted Obedience to the Rules and Precepts it enjoins: this will more effectually secure the Interests, & promote the Credit of it, than either the Eloquence of our Preachers, or the Authority of our Laws. And, (blessed be God,) the Righteous are not failed from the Earth, but we can still appeal to bright & numerous Examples of Virtue among us. The Number and Devotion of those who frequent our Altars, and the many great and excellent Works of Piety & Charity promoted among us, are a burning and a shining Light, such an Evidence of the internal Power of our Religion on the Minds of its Disciples, as must command Reverence from all who behold it, and ought to be allowed in Balance against those Examples, with whose Crimes our Adversaries are so ready to reproach us. — But,

Let us not content ourselves with being better than our Enemies represent us; let us go on unto Perfection, and improve every Grace of our Religion. Let us add to our Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge,

Knowledge, to Knowledge Patience, Temperance, and Charity. ~~Let us~~ ~~by~~ ~~our~~ ~~own~~ ~~quiet~~ ~~Behavi-~~
our cut-off all Occasion from those who seek Oc-
casion, that they may have whereof to accuse us.
And tho we have all Encouragements to hope that
the evil Day of Persecution is far from us, yet let
us always live in such a Preparation of Mind, that
if God shall at any Time call us to a Trial of our
Faith, we may acquit ourselves with a Courage be-
coming the Hope and Spirit of Christians. In Sum,
Let the Beauty of our Religion appear in the Holin-
ess of our Lives. Let our Virtue shine forth as the
Light, and our just Dealing as the Noon-day. Then
shall our Sion appear fair and lovely to her Friends,
and to her Enemies, strong and terrible, as an Army
set in Battle-array. Then shall the Righteous re-
sort unto her Assemblies, and even Sinners be con-
verted unto her: and every one that is near, and
every one that is afar off, will be induced to give
Praise unto God, and, seeing our good Works, to
glorify our Father which is in Heaven; Yea, and
for these things God himself will reward us; "them
that honour me, (saith God,) I will honour:" God
himself will bless us, and all the Ends of the World
will fear him.

Sermon

SERMON

The Wickedness of Christians.

**no
Argument against Christianity.**

Gal. ii. 17. "But if, while we seek to be justified
"by Christ, we ourselves also are found Sin-
"ners; is therefore Christ the Minister of Sin?
"God forbid."

One of the greatest and most plausible Objections
alleged by Unbelievers against the divine Institu-
tion of the Christian Religion; is the Smallness of
the Influence it may seem to have upon the Lives
and Manners of its Professors. It were natural to
expect, if God condescended to give Men an ex-
press revealed Law, and to send so extraordinary a
Person as his own Son to promulgate That Law
upon Earth; it were natural to expect, it should
have some very visible and remarkable Effect in the
World, answerable to the Dignity of the Thing it-
self, and worthy of its Great Author. They who

are blessed with such singular Advantages, "what Manner of Persons, (as St. Peter expresses it,) ought they to be, in all holy Conversation and Godliness?" And, are there then, (will Unbelievers be apt to say,) are there to be met withal in the Lives and Manners of Christians, any considerable Marks or distinguishing Characters, by which it might be judged that they are really under the Influence and peculiar Guidance of such a divine Director? Is there, among those who call themselves Christians, less of Profaneness and Impiety towards God; less of Fraud, Injustice and Unrighteousness towards Men, than among the Professors of other Religions? Is there not too plainly the same boundless Ambition, the same insatiable Covetousness, the same Voluptuousness and Corruption of Manners to be found among them, as among other Men? — Indeed, have not moreover the Pretences even of Religion itself, been the immediate and direct Occasion of the bitterest and most implacable Animosities, of the cruellest and most bloody Wars, of the most barbarous and inhuman Persecutions? Hath not even "the Grace of God," (as the Apostle expresses it,) been itself but too frequently "turned into Lasciviousness?" (i.e.) Hath not the great and fundamental Grace of the Gospel, the

gracious Promises of Pardon upon true Repentance and Amendment, been itself abused into an-Encouragement of Wicked Living, in a Dependence upon the Formalities of a Death-bed Repentance?

Very great, and very just Reproaches indeed are these, upon many who profess themselves to be Followers of Christ. — But,

That such Objections have no conclusive Consequence at all, against Christianity itself, is what the Apostle, after a very affectionate Manner, declares in the Words of the Text, "If, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found Sinners; is therefore Christ the Minister of Sin? God forbid: For, if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a Transgressor:" If Christianity be made a Support, to That which it was ultimately and essentially intended to destroy; it is no longer Christianity, but a wicked and inconsistent Abuse of that sacred Name and Character.

In discoursing, therefore, upon these Words, I shall show,

First, That the Wickedness of the Lives of those who call themselves Christians, is no Argument at all against the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Religion itself.

That the Practice however of Any Wicked
 Act, though it affords no real Argument against
 Christianity itself, yet is Matter of very great and
 just Reproach to the Professors of this Holy Reli-
 gion, as being the utmost Contradiction and the
 highest possible Inconsistency with their Profession.

III. That hence consequently we have a very
 plain and easy Rule, to judge of the Malignity and
 Danger of Any Error in Matters of Religion: In
 Proportion as the Error tends to reconcile Any
 Vicious Practice with the Profession of Religion, or
 (as the Text expresses it,) to make "Christ the Mi-
 nister of Sin;" in the same Proportion is the Doc-
 trine pernicious, and the Teachers of it justly to be
 deemed Corrupt. — And,

First, The Wickedness of the Lives of Those
 who call themselves Christians, is No Argument at
 all against the Truth or Excellency of the Christian
 Religion itself.

NATURAL and NECESSARY Causes, always and ne-
 cessarily produce Effects proportional to their na-
 tural Powers; so that from the Degree or Quantity
 of the Effect, may always certainly be judged the
 Degree of Power and Efficacy in the Cause: But in
 MORAL Causes, the Case is necessarily and essential-

ly otherwise. In These, how efficacious soever the Cause be, yet the Effect always depends on the Will of the Person, upon whom the Effect is to be worked, whether the Cause shall at all produce its proper Effect, or no. The Christian Religion affords Men the most Perfect Instructions possible, in the Ways of Virtue; and Arguments infinitely strong, to enforce the Practice of it. The Effect of this Doctrine upon the Lives of Men, in the Primitive Times, before Worldly Corruptions entered into the Church; was very great and conspicuous. And, if We understand the Prophecies rightly, which relate to things "yet to come;" this Effect will be still much more remarkable, in the " Latter Ages " When the Corruptions, which Now prevail among Christians, shall be reformed; and " the Earth shall be full of the Knowledge of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea." As things AT PRESENT stand, there are great Numbers of Men, many more than are taken-notice-of in the Noise and Hurry of the most Busy Part of the World; who, upon the Foundation of a firm and well-settled Belief in the Gospel of Christ, go on regularly and constantly in the Course of a sober, honest, and virtuous Life; with a perpetual uniform Sense of God upon their Minds, and an assured Expectation of a future Judgment.

Judgment. And even among Those who proudly reject the Assistance of Revelation, as useless, & rely entirely upon their own natural Abilities in Matters of Religion; it is very plain, that the greatest Part of those right Notions concerning God and Virtue, about which they can now so readily and so clearly discourse, are really almost wholly borrowed from the Light of That Revelation, which they are desirous should be thought entirely needless. This, we say, is very plain and evident, from the extreme Darkness and Ignorance wherewith the Heathen World is universally overspread, notwithstanding there are not wanting among them Men of excellent natural Abilities; and from the right Notions of God and Virtue to be found among Christians, in Numbers of Persons even of the lowest Capacities and of the meanest Employments, to a Degree which Few, exceeding Few, even of the greatest and most eminent Philosophers, were ever able to arrive at. So very different a thing is it, to see and discern the Reasonableness of Moral Obligations, after they have been once clearly revealed; and to be able, without any Assistance, to discover at first, the same Obligations, by the mere Strength of Nature and Reason. But however This be; and supposing the Effect of Christianity in the World, had

been much smaller than it has been; still, we say, This would be no Argument at all against the Truth and Excellency of the Doctrine itself, because, (as already observed,) in all MORAL Causes, it does and must always depend on the WILL of the Person, upon whom the Effect is to be worked, whether even the most powerful and Efficacious Cause shall at all produce its proper Effect, or No.

When God himself calls Men, in the strongest and most efficacious Manner that is consistent with his Calling them at all, it is still in their own Power, not to hearken to that Call, nor to be in any Respect the better for it, nay, to be the worse for it, much worse than if they had "never known the Way of Righteousness." For as, "where no Law is, there is no Transgression;" so on the other Side, and for the same Reason, where there is a Law, not obeyed, That "Law worketh Wrath, and Sin, by this Commandment, becomes exceeding sinful."

Were therefore the Effect always to be the Measure, in judging of the Goodness and Excellency of a Cause; the best and wisest Laws would often, upon Account of their very Excellency, be the worst. The Law of God, would be chargeable with the Malignity of Sin; and God himself, as the real and immediate Author of Evil.

The Commandment

men (saith St. Paul) which was ordained to Life, I found to be unto Death: For Sin, taking Occasion by the Commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me: &c. Working Death in me by that which is good; that Sin, by the Commandment, might become exceeding sinful. And the same may, in Proportion, be said concerning Reason itself, even the absolute and necessary Reason of Things. The more we are sensible of the Reasonableness and Necessity of Moral Obligations, the worse is our Condition if we act unreasonably. Yet Reason is of essential Excellency, eternally & immutably, being the necessary Result of the Nature and Truth of Things: And the "Commandments," of "God, who cannot err," are always "Holy, and Just, and Good."

If therefore it be no Objection against the Excellency of Reason itself, that it very often is not able to make Men act reasonably; and no Diminution to the Divine Commandments in general, that they frequently not only fail of reforming Men's Manners, but even on the contrary do moreover make Sin to become the more exceedingly sinful: then for the same Reason, neither against the Truth and Excellency of Christianity in particular, can any Argument be drawn, from the Wickedness of the

Lives of Those who profess themselves Christians.

But. II. Though the Practice of Any Wickedness whatsoever, affords no real Argument against Christianity itself; yet it is always Matter of very great and just Reproach to the Professors of this Holy Religion, as being the utmost Contradiction and the highest possible Inconsistency with their Profession. The Design and End of Christ's Religion, is to amend and reform the Manners of Men; that he might purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works; a People, who might "shine as Lights in the World," by the exemplary Practice of all Virtue and Goodness. Every Vice, that any Christian is guilty of, has a Tendency to defeat this great End; and brings Dishonour upon the Name, & upon the Religion of Christ. For "when ever Christians appear wicked and corrupt in their Manners, " the Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles, through Them, as it is written;" (i.e.) Unbelievers are confirmed in their Infidelity, and Scoffers are encouraged to make a Scorn of Religion. Just as the Jews of old, who perpetually styled themselves the "People of God," and yet fell into the Vices of the Heathen Nations. Concerning whom the Prophet complains, "When they entred unto the Heathen whither they went, they profaned

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profaned my Holy Name, when they said to them, These are the People of the Lord, & are gone forth out of his Land."

to "It must needs," indeed, happen, (corrupt as the Nature of Mankind is,) that such "Offences as these will come:" (i.e) among Numbers of Men, endued with Liberty of Will, and liable to many Temptations, it cannot be expected, notwithstanding all the Means and Assistances of the Gospel, but that Some Men will be wicked and incorrigible. But "Wo be to That Man, (saith our Saviour,) through whom the Offence cometh." Every such Person, whatever his Profession be, is an Enemy to Christ, and a Reproach to his Religion. "Little Children, (saith St. John,) let no Man deceive you: He that committeth Sin, is of the Devil's" and - "Whosoever doth not Righteousness, is not of God."

Every Vice therefore whatsoever, that any Christian is guilty of, has, in general, a Tendency to defeat the great End and Design of Christianity; and brings Dishonour upon the Name, and upon the Religion of Christ. But when any thing which is a Part of the Christian Doctrine, is itself, in particular, made a direct Ground and immediate Cause of Wickedness; the Case THEN is infinitely worse, and the Reproach unspeakably greater. When the

Gospel is not only rendered ineffectual to prevent Sin, but "Christ, (as the Apostle in the Text expresses it,) made to be Himself the Minister of Sin;" this is what St. Jude calls, "Turning the Grace of God into Lasciviousness;" or, in St. Peter's Language, it is, by Means of the very "Promise of Liberty, making Men the Servants of Corruption." Of This Kind were Those in the Apostle's Days, who "said, Let us do Evil, that Good may come; Whose Damnation is just;" Of the same Sort were Those, who, because the Apostle had taught them, "Ye are not under the Law, but under Grace," thought they might the more safely indulge themselves in Sin, for that they were "not under the Law, but under Grace:" And because the Apostle, extolling the Mercy and Compassion of God, had affirmed that, "where Sin abounded, Grace did much more abound;" therefore they concluded, that they might "continue in Sin, that Grace might abound." And of the same Kind are Those Christians at all Times and in All Places, who, upon any Pretence whatsoever, set up Any Expedients, of whatever Sort they be, either in Point of Doctrine or Practice; as Equivalents to be accepted of God, in the Stead of Virtue and true Goodness. Concerning whom our Saviour speaks thus, — "Who-so-ever

ever shall break one of these least Commandments, and shall teach Men so : (i.e. whoſoever ſhall upon any Preſence, or by any Doctrine whatſoever, di-
miniſh the Neceſſity of Moral Virtue,) he ſhall be called the Leaft in the Kingdom of Heaven ; that is, (as it would Now be expreſſed in modern Lan-
guage,) ſuch a One ſhall LEAST of all Men ever be admitted there, or, of all Men he ſhall be the LAſT that will ever be received into the Kingdom of God.

We uſually and very juſtly expoſe the Folly of Superſtition, in general ; but, all Superſtitions are not equally ridiculous : But the Deceit is the very ſame, and equally Fatal ; when Chriſtians of Any Denomination, teach Men to expect Salvation by Means of any Expedient whatſoever, by Means of any thing which an Immoral Perſon can poſſibly do for himſelf, or which any other Perſon can poſſibly do for him ; by his fiercely adhering to the Doctrines or Practices of Any Sect whatſoever, by his preſumptuouſly relying upon the Merits of Chriſt himſelf, or by any other Method whatſoever, ſo long as he continues really in the Number of Thoſe, concerning whom our Lord has declared and earneſtly warned us, that, whatever Acknowledgments and Profeſſions they may make, in " calling him, Lord, Lord ;" and whatever Hopes they may

flatter themselves withal, in having "prophecied and even worked Miracles in his Name;" still he will profess unto them at the Great Day, "I never knew you; Depart from Me, ye that work Iniquity." — I proceed therefore;

III. To show that, from what has been said, there arises a very plain and easy Rule, by which we may judge of the Malignity and Dangerousness of Any Error in Matters of Religion. In Proportion as the Error tends to reconcile Any Vicious Practice with the Profession of Religion, or, (as the Text expresses it,) to make "Christ the Minister of Sin;" in the same Proportion is the Doctrine pernicious, and the Teachers of it justly to be deemed Corrupt. And This is the Reason, why our Lord, when he warns Christians to "beware of False Teachers, who should come to them in Sheep's Cloathing, but inwardly they were ravening Wolves;" gives us this One Mark only, by which for ever to distinguish them; "By their Fruits ye shall know them." All other Tests, may possibly be deceitful: Fair Speeches, Great Learning and Abilities, Fervent Zeal, Numbers, Authority, strict Observance of Ceremonies, even Worldly Austarities, & the Appearances of the most devotional Piety; all these may possibly accompany, a very False and very Wicked Religion.

Religion. But the Fruits of Virtue and True Goodness these are Marks which admit No Counterfeits. If the Course of a Man's Life be virtuous and charitable; and his Doctrine leads Men towards no Superstition, towards nothing but Virtue and Goodness and Charity, in Expectation Of That righteous Judgment to come, which the Lights of Nature itself gave Men reason to look for; and which God has Now assured absolutely by the Gospel of Christ. This is a Mark or Character, to which nothing has any Similitude, but what is itself really, and truly the same. All other Doctrines & Presences of Religion, may possibly be very consistent with making Christ the Minister of Sin." If they be so, they are at best uncertain or useless Doctrines; & if they have any direct Tendency to encourage and promote this Evil, then it is infallibly certain that they are False and Pernicious. Hence, (for Instance,) we may very easily know, what Judgment we ought to frame of Those, who at any Time set themselves against the Use of Reason in Matters of Religion; & decry Morality as legel & foreign to the Gospel; ascribing our Salvation to Faith only; - that we are justified FREELY, - that we are elected of God, and chosen in Christ, & predestinated to Life; making a principle Part of the Obedience of the Gospel, to

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consist in professing confidently to believe, and in zealously contending to maintain, certain Opinions whereof they have No Understanding; Which is evidently the easiest thing in the World, for the most wicked and worthless of Men to do.

And Further, Of Mankind in general, we may infer by this Rule, how great and fatal a Deceit it is, and which also but too generally prevails, when Men, confessing their Sins to God himself, look upon themselves absolved in Course, and return to the Practice of the same Sins again; grounding perfectly, upon the gracious Promises of the Gospel, a false and delusive Notion of Repentance; very much like to That of Those in the Apostles' Days, who "continued in Sin, that Grace might abound;" Which is destroying the very Nature and Necessity of Virtue, and is the highest Contempt and Mockery of God, turning his very Mercy into an Encouragement of Disobedience; and instead of reforming the World, actually corrupting it, &c. literally making "Christ the Minister of Sin."

Sermon

Vol. VII.

SERMON —

Apostasy,
The Sin and Danger of it.

Matt. x. 33. "Whosoever shall deny me before
Men, him will I also deny before my Father
which is in Heaven."

In this Chapter we find the Saviour of the World sending his twelve Disciples on their first Mission, to preach the glad Tidings of the Gospel to the Jews. And in Order to qualify them fully for it, he endues them with miraculous Powers, to confirm the Truth of their Doctrines; commands them to make "whoever should thus receive him" should be understood by our Lord to have shewn the same Respect to himself; and "whosoever should thus receive him" should be rewarded as if he had received that God "who sent him;" and on the other Hand, he most terribly denounces, that it should "be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment," than for those Cities which did not receive them, and in the Words of the Text, that "whosoever shall deny him before Men, him will He also deny before his Father which is in Heaven."

In speaking to which Words I shall endeavour to shew:

First,

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Sermon

no Preparation for their Journey; but refer themselves to the Justice of their Cause; and his Providence that sent them; and teaches them how they should behave themselves in all things: and that they might not be disappointed in the Event, He foretells them what would be the final Consequence of their Preaching, not only to themselves, but likewise to those that heard them, both here and hereafter. He commands them to preach the "Kingdom of Heaven only to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel;" and in Proof, &c. (under) —

of Israel;" and in Proof of its Approach, to "cleanse their Lepers, heal their Sick," and exercise their other miraculous Gifts among them, with the same Freedom with which they had received them. He foretells, with Regard to themselves, that they should hereafter be imprisoned, scourged, & brought before Kings and Governors for his Sake; and for a Testimony against those Kings and Governors in particular, and in general, against all the Gentiles, among whom they should preach. And with Regard to those who should hear them, he most graciously declares, on the one Hand, that "whosoever received them" should be understood by our Lord to have shewn the same Respect to himself; and "whosoever should thus receive him" should be rewarded as if he had received that God "who sent him;" and on the other Hand, he most terribly denounces, that it should "be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment," than for those Cities which did not receive them, and in the Words of the Text, that "whosoever shall deny him before Men, him will He also deny before his Father which is in Heaven."

In speaking to which Words I shall endeavour to shew: First,

First, What is meant by "denying our blessed Lord before Men."

II. The heinous Guilt of this Sin. — And then,

III. The great Danger of it, expressed by the Terror of the Threatening here denounced against it.

After which, — I shall Conclude with an Inference or two with Respect to ourselves. — And,

I. The first thing is to shew, what is meant by "denying our blessed Lord before Men;" which, (when applied to those who have once professed the Gospel,) must primarily signify their avowed Apostasy from the sacred Truths of our Religion: their openly and voluntarily relinquishing the Profession of our most holy Faith; for Judaism, Heathenism, or what some Men call the Religion of Nature, or which is worse, for no Religion at all. This is denying the Lord of Life in the worst Sense; it is "trampling under Foot the Blood of the Son of God," with the greatest Scorn and Contempt; and "doing the highest Despite to the Holy Spirit of Grace." It is treating our adorable Redeemer as an Impostor; — it is rejecting his Doctrines as false, or at least as not sufficiently supported; & it seems therefore to be doing all that in them lies, to be guilty of that "Sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall

shall not be forgiven, neither in this World, nor in the World to come" for either they do believe that there were such Persons as our blessed Saviour and his Apostles in the World, so that they did perform the wonderful things which are recorded of them, or they do not. If they do not believe these Facts, they must, in Effect, contend that no Credit is to be given to any History, and deny any thing to be true which they have not seen. And if they do believe that such Persons did preach the Gospel, and that such Miracles were wrought by them, their base Apostasy from Christianity implies, that they impute those Works to infernal Agents, and make them the Operations of Devils: (i.e.) they put those Demonstrations of the Spirit, and of Power, the mighty Gifts of the Holy Ghost, upon a Level with magical Incantations or Delusions: they, in Effect, say of our Lord and Master, that He and his Disciples had unclean Spirits; which was the Crime of which the Jews were guilty, when they were told that the Sin against the Holy Ghost should not be forgiven unto Men — Indeed,

There is this Difference between them, that the Jews saw the Works of the Son of God wrought; which our modern Apostates do not: But, when it is remembered, that the Testimony of the "Spirit

was not THEN given" to the Truth of his Doctrine; and when the Attestation of the whole Christian Church for so many Ages is thrown into the Balance against the bare Want of seeing those things which have been, and are so fully proved; doubtless, Equity will require but very little Abatement to be made in the Sentence on that Account. And whoever considers the daring Iniquity of thus openly bidding Defiance to the Son of God, will not wonder that even the meek and humble Jesus should pronounce, concerning such Offenders, that he will deny them to have any Share in his Atonement at the great Day of Retribution, when he will come to judge both the Quick and the Dead. — Again,

Next to the open Apostasy from the Faith, a second Kind of Denial of our Lord is that of those who are either afraid or ashamed to confess him, in Times of Reproach or Danger.

Unless Men are very firmly established in the Faith, it is no Wonder that Persecutions and Death should terrify them from the open Profession of it. Human Infirmities and human Passions considered, these are such strong Temptations as the weak and wavering in their Religion cannot well be expected to resist. And therefore, says our blessed Lord of the Seed sown "in stony Places," that they at first
"receive

receive the Word with Joy, but when Persecution or Tribulation ariseth because of the Word, they are presently offended; (7.e) they forsake the Truth and disown it. But even this, we know, will not be allowed as a sufficient Plea in the Sight of God, to excuse our Denial of his beloved Son in the Sight of Men. His "Love to us surpasseth Knowledge," and he requires in Return, that ours for him should exceed all others which can come in Competition with it. He underwent the most grievous Pains, inflicted in the most unjust & aggravating Manner, for our Salvation; and he requires that neither Life nor Death should separate us from him, or deter us from "taking up our Cross and following him." And if those who call themselves by his Name want Resolution to do this, it is either because they do not enough consider the Wonders of his Life, Death, and Mediation; or do not duly apply themselves to that Purity of Heart, and Elevation of Mind, which the Gospel prescribes. And therefore, (says our Blessed Lord,) "He that loveth Father or Mother, Sister or Brother, Wife or Children, more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that forsaketh not all that he hath, (Life itself not excepted, when he can enjoy it on no other Terms than by denying the Earth,) and followeth not

after me, is not worthy of me."—To which I shall add,

Thirdly, That it is a virtual and tacit Denial of our Lord, to neglect frequenting the public Offices of the Christian Church; if done either in Compliance with the vicious Customs and Humours of Men, who blasphemously revile and despise a crucified Saviour, or out of an idle and foolish Fear of being thought weak or superstitious.

When Christianity is become the Religion of a Country, it is to be expected that many Persons will for Fashion-sake only profess it; and when Wealth, Luxury, and all Kinds of Excess increase, it is by no Means strange that the proud, the luxurious, and the lustful, should in their Hearts be Enemies to the meek, the humble, the pure, and the mortifying Doctrines of the blessed Jesus. And if they proceed one Step farther to Blasphemies and Revilings, they only speak a Language which is consistent with their general Conduct; and the open Revolt or Desertion of such corrupted Members could be no real Loss or Injury to the true mystical Body of the Christian Church.

But for those who are at all sincere in their Profession of the Gospel, to be led by Fashion, or Custom, or a vain Fear of the Censures and Reproaches

of

of the Scorners, to neglect the public Worship of their God and Saviour: this betrays the greatest Weakness of Mind, and is unquestionably a Crime of a very deep Dye. To do this on such Motives is plainly to prefer the Praise of Men, of weak, wicked, and foolish Men, to the Praise of God; and it is so far denying our blessed Lord before them, as it implies a Backwardness and false Shame, to appear open and constant in professing him.

One Design of the Institution of Christian Worship is to testify our own Sincerity, and to edify others by paying our Devotions, in the most open and public Manner, to that God whom we profess to serve; and our Creeds are wisely inserted in the public Offices of that Worship, that, by repeating them openly and audibly in the Face of the Congregation, we should acquit ourselves of any Suspicions of being ashamed to confess our Saviour, and should both admonish, encourage, and comfort one another with these Words. And not to do this barely to avoid the Ridicule of a profane Jest, or a blasphemous Scoff, or in Order to indulge the Vices, and procure the Countenance of any Man or Body of Men, how great soever, is to betray the Cause of Christianity to its Enemies in the basest Manner, and it is in Effect selling our Master at a

lower Price than even the Traitor Judas sold him. And, alas ! what would become of such Christians, if it should please God to suffer the Enemies of our Faith, not only to ridicule, but to persecute the Profession of it ? What could be expected from them, but that they would, upon the first Trial, renounce their Religion, and betake themselves to any other which should be safe & in Esteem ? And yet our great Master assures us, in the Words of the Text, that "whosoever shall," on any Account, "deny him before Men, shall be denied by him before his Father which is in Heaven." The Reason of which will more fully appear if we consider,

II. The heinous Guilt of this Sin, which will be evident if we remember that it is a Breach of all Faith, and of the most solemn Engagements with God and Man.

What can be more solemn, or more obligatory, than the Christian Covenant ? What can reach the Consciences of Men, and influence their Practice, if such Engagements will not ? The strictest Obligation that can be invented, to bind Men to Fidelity with one another, is that of an Oath ; wherein they appeal to God's Justice, and invoke his Vengeance, if they falsify or deceive ; and this we do in a much more solemn and awful Manner in our baptismal Vows

How much in any other Case whatever. For we shew not only appeal to the Almighty as a Witness of the Truth of what we say, or the Sincerity of what we promise; but we enter into a Covenant in which God himself is a Party; We bind ourselves to him, and his Religion, in the strictest Manner that Words, or Oaths can do; and we appeal to his Church, in whose Presence we do it, as Witnesses to the Engagements. Nor does it lessen the Obligation that this is done in our Infancy; because we renew the same, and make it our own Act, in our riper Years, both in our Confirmation and whenever we partake of the blessed Sacrament. And for a Christian, after all this, to renounce his Faith, and deny his Saviour is the most provoking Insolence that Mortal Man can offer to the God that made him; it is affronting the Almighty to his Face; and is bidding Defiance to his Vengeance in so daring and audacious a Manner, as must fill serious Minds with Horror and Dread. — And, with Regard to one another, it is appealing to the whole Christian Church to prove that nothing can lay any Manner of Restraint upon them in whatever they are inclined to do; it is proclaiming to the whole World, that they can break through all Obligations, and are not to be bound by any Ties, either civil or

sacred. And therefore, the primitive Church denied those who apostatized from her the Privilege of being accepted as credible Witnesses in her Courts of Judicature, because they had already broke through stronger Ties to Truth and Sincerity than any others that could be laid upon them; and there was no Reason but to conclude that they who could, upon any Motives, break through them, would make no Scruple of despising all other Obligations, when their Passions or Interests should lead them to it. — Again,

It is a further Aggravation of this heinous Sin, that it generally proceeds from base and unworthy Motives; such as Lust and Intemperance, a Love of Singularity, or Pride & Self-conceit. In Times of Persecution, indeed, the Sight of Racks & Torture and the Dread of Death, or even less grievous Sufferings, may terrify weak and tender Minds into the Performance of what in their Hearts they detest and abhor; and both Charity and Humanity require that great Allowances should be made to the Weakness and Infirmities of human Nature in such Cases. But when Men are at Liberty to continue in the Profession of their Faith with Impunity, it is not to be conceived that any thing but a Slavery to some Lust, Interest, or Passion, can prompt

prompt them to renounce and revile a Religion so beautiful and lovely in itself, and so strongly proved to come from God; a Religion so pure & so peaceable; so full of Comfort to each Individual, and so beneficial to human Society, as that of the blessed Jesus. It is not to be conceived that any thing but the Restraints it lays on Men's Actions and Passions can make them Enemies to so divine and heavenly an Institution; as on the other Hand it is not easy for any Man to foresee to what Lengths in Iniquity those Passions will carry him, if given a Loose to, and indulged. Humility, for Instance, is the Basis of all Christian Graces; and Pride and Self-conceit is the Source of the greatest Crimes: what will not the vain Man do to get-rid of so uneasy a Restraint as that of being "meek & lowly in Heart?" What will he not do, to gain the Applause and Flatteries of Men, and acquire Fame and Renown for Depth and Penetration? He will even deny his God and laugh at Religion, in Order to shew that he can see further than other Men, and to convince the World that he can discover Fallacies and Deceit in what the rest of Mankind highly reverence and esteem. And since his Self-sufficiency and Pride of Heart is as contrary to the Laws of God, as Theft, Lewdness, or Deceit, it is consequently as much a Crime,

and, (if the Word be rightly understood,) as much an Immorality as they; and it is an Aggravation of the great Sin of Apostasy, that it often proceeds from base and corrupt Motives; it is accumulating Crimes, and committing one Sin for the Sake of another. — Once more,

What further heightens this Iniquity, is, that it implies as great Folly as Wickedness: it is giving up what is most valuable and useful in Life for nothing, or for what is worse than nothing, upon the Exchange.

True Christianity is the only firm Basis on which the Soul of Man can rest in this Vale of Misery; the only Spring of solid Peace and Comfort which is afforded us on this Side the Grave. This, and this only, can make the Enjoyments we meet with here rational and manly, and the Sufferings easy and supportable. And yet this inestimable Jewel is wantonly and foolishly thrown away by the Apostate; who can propose nothing in Exchange for it, but to live and die "like the Beasts that perish." He can propose nothing more than to indulge his carnal Lusts and Appetites while he lives; and to persuade himself that when he dies, he shall perish forever. And for the Sake of this he breaks all Faith with God and Man; gives up the continual Feast of a
good

good Conscience, abandons the ineffable Comfort vouchsafed to the Faithful by the Son and Holy Spirit of God; and relinquishes the joyful and enlivening hopes of eternal Glory.

Such is his Folly, such is his Madness, with Respect to present Life: — What he further hazards, and how much he will suffer hereafter, will appear, if we consider,

III. The great Danger of this Sin, and the terrible Threatenings here denounced against it, that such Persons “shall be denied by our blessed Lord before his Father which is in Heaven.”

The extreme Danger of a State of Apostasy appears from hence, that it is very hard to conceive what can bring Men who glory in it to Repentance, without which there can be no Remission. The Reason given why the Sin against the Holy Ghost is pronounced unpardonable, is, that it proceeds from such a Perverseness of Mind as will not suffer any Evidence to convince Men of the Sinfulness of it; and this holds as strongly in the present Case as in any other. And therefore, says the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, of this very Sin of Apostasy “it is impossible” (i.e) it is extremely difficult “for those who were once enlightened,” (by baptism,) “and have tasted of the heavenly Gift,”

(vouchsafed to them in that Sacrament,) "and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come," (i.e. the mighty Blessings of the Christian Dispensation;) it is impossible, if they fall away, from the Faith, and renounce it, "to renew them again by Repentance." — Again, — "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth," (i.e. if we obstinately and perversely renounce the Gospel, after we have embraced it, "there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin;" we then disclaim the only Mediator between God and Man, the Lord Christ Jesus, by whom alone we could obtain Remission of Sins; and nothing remains "but a certain fearful looking-for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries."

What this Judgment and fiery Indignation will be, may be explained by the Threatening here denounced, that our Lord will "deny such Adversaries before his Father which is in Heaven."

In which Words he seems to allude to the great Day of Retribution; when, according to the Account he himself has been pleased to give us of it, all those whom he shall judge, both Quick and Dead, shall be either crowned with everlasting Happiness,

or

will be to eternal misery; according as he shall then confess or deny them. He will then appear, at his second Advent, "with Power & great Glory;" he will appear surrounded with the Angels of God, and attended with the Host of Heaven: this Jesus, who is now despised and vilified by those who once professed his holy Name, will appear clothed with Omnipotence, Majesty, and Terror. "Who, (says the Prophet,) may abide the Day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appeareth?" - "For behold, all the Proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as Stubble; and the Day that cometh shall burn them up," saith the Lord of Hosts. "This contemned and forsaken Saviour will then appear in the Clouds of Heaven, and summon the whole Earth in Judgment before him; and he will then "before his heavenly Father," before the Angels, and before Men, declare to those who "denied him here, Depart from me, ye Wicked; I know you not: depart, ye cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels."

Thus have I endeavoured to shew what is meant by denying our blessed Lord before Men; the heinous Nature of that Sin; and the mighty Danger, and most terrible Consequences that will infallibly attend it. — I shall now,

IV. Conclude with an Inference or two, by Way of Application :- The first is,

That we be not discouraged, or led into any Doubts or Fears concerning our holy Religion, by the open Apostasy and Profaneness of those among us who renounce, ridicule, and blaspheme it. They fight against God, who will perform his Promises; and they fulfil the holy Scriptures whilst they revile them. The sacred Writers forewarn us, that "in the last Days shall come Scoffers, walking after their own Lusts, and denying the Lord that bought them." But, alas! "against whom do they exalt themselves, and lift up their Voice on high?" even against that Jesus "who is exalted to the right Hand of God; Angels, Principalities, and Powers being made subject unto him." Against him do they utter vain Words, who died to save them from Destruction; and who will be the present Strength, and the future Salvation of every Soul that trusteth still upon him. These Attempts shew the Malice and Wickedness of Men; but impeach not either the Truth or the Power of God. Christianity is not at all the less true because they forsake and revile it; neither is the Vengeance or Faithfulness of God the less certain, because he "bears long with them." On the contrary, we ought,

might; (as St. Peter directs,) to recount that the long suffering of our Lord is Salvation. It is designed for the Edification of his Church; & it should strengthen our Faith, and confirm our Confidence in him, lest we also fall from our own steadfastness."

Many gracious Designs of Providence are answered by it; one of which is, that they which are approved may be made manifest among us. And therefore the proper Use to be made of it is, M

Lastly, To be led thereby to be the more open, resolute, and constant, in the Defence and Profession of the Gospel: as we shall hereby not only save ourselves, but may perhaps recover those who are already fallen. (*) We have now, &c. [under]

we are not ashamed of a reviled and crucified Saviour. The Time is "a Time of Reproach, Rebuke, and Blasphemy;" and it is therefore the indispensable Duty of every faithful Christian to shew himself such with Constancy and Courage. It is his Duty to be more than ordinarily diligent, in frequenting the public Offices of the Church; and to shew his Zeal and Love for his Redeemer by joining in all the Parts of them, & confessing his Lord "before Men," in the most public Manner. It is his Duty, in whatever Station, to do all that in him lies to put a Stop to the Infidelity of the Age, and to

Vol. vii.

free

(*) It is to be lamented that Backsliders are too often treated with Contempt, or else neglected; but surely when we consider how God loves his People, and how strongly he has expressed his Desire for the recovery of them; we must be much concerned to bring them home again, and the following are perhaps some of the best Methods for that Purpose: 1. *Persevere them, constantly to attend the Means.* There are many Degrees in this Sin, and though some attend Public Worship in their backslidden state, yet others are gone so far, as either in Whole or in Part to leave off Attendance: now in recovering gain to the Means is likely to recover them, and endeavour to draw them by all Manner of Exhortations to God's House. 2. *Very Affectionately strive to bring them to a Sense of their Sin in reflecting upon God's Love before them in a very tender and gentle Manner what God says in Jer. iii. 22. &c. and other Places, concerning his Kindness to* [under]

IV. Conclude with an Inference or two, by Way of Application :- The first is,

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might, (as St. Peter directs,) "to recount that the long suffering of our Lord is Salvation." It is designed for the Edification of his Church; & it should strengthen our Faith, and confirm our Confidence in him, lest we also fall from our own Seedfastness. Many gracious Designs of Providence are answered by it; one of which is, that they which are approved may be made manifest among us. And therefore the proper Use to be made of it is, Lastly, To be led thereby to be the more open,

"We have now an Opportunity of approving our Sincerity in our holy Religion, by shewing that we are not ashamed of a crucified and crucified Saviour. The Time is "a Time of Reproach, Rebuke, and Blasphemy;" and it is therefore the indispensable Duty of every faithful Christian to shew himself such with Constancy and Courage. It is his Duty to be more than ordinarily diligent, in frequenting the public Offices of the Church; and to shew his Zeal and Love for his Redeemer by joining in all the Parts of them, & confessing his Lord "before Men," in the most public Manner. It is his Duty, in whatever Station, to do all that in him lies to put a Stop to the Infidelity of the Age, and to

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free

(*) It is to be lamented that Backsliders are too often treated with Contempt, or else neglected; but surely when we consider how God loves his People, and how strongly he has expressed his Desire for their recovery, by sending them home again, we should be very desirous to bring them home again, and the following are perhaps some of the best Methods for that Purpose. 1. Persevere them carefully to attend the Means. There are many Degrees in this Sin, and though some attend Public Worship in their backslidden state, yet others are glad to stir up the whole or in Part to leave off Attendance. Now to withhold them from the Means is likely to recover them; and to stir them up by all Manner of Exhortations to God's House. 2. Very gently strive to bring them to a Sense of their Sin in reflecting on God's For before them is a very tender and gentle Father who God says in Jer. iii. 22. and other Places concerning the Church in [under]

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ought; (as St. Peter directs,) "to account that the Long-suffering of our Lord is Salvation." It is designed for the Edification of his Church; & it should strengthen our Faith, and confirm our Confidence in him; lest we also fall from our own Seedfastness. Many gracious Designs of Providence are answered by it; one of which is, that they which are approved may be made manifest among us. And therefore the proper Use to be made of it is, M

Lastly, To be led thereby to be the more open, resolute, and constant, in the Defence and Profession of the Gospel: as we shall hereby not only save ourselves, but may perhaps recover those who are already fallen. (*) We have now, &c. [under]

we are not ashamed of a ~~servile and crooked~~ ^{servile and crooked} Saviour. The Time is "a Time of Reproach, Rebuke, and Blasphemy;" and it is therefore the ~~receiving returning~~ ^{receiving returning} *Prodigals*. This if spoken in a very friendly and pathetic Manner, is more likely to move Backsliders than any Kind of harsh Measures, as their Consciences must tell them how ungrateful they act against the Blessed God. 3dly, Often pray *with*, and read to them. Above all Means Prayer is most likely to reclaim, and therefore not only pray *for*, but (if they will permit you) pray *also with* them, and read to them such particular Portions of Scripture as are applicable, as Jer. xxii. 18, 19. Ezek. xxxiv. 16, &c. and also such pious Books as may tend to awaken their Conscience, or move their Affections towards God. If Ministers, or the Friends of Backsliders, would be more attentive, and *kind* to them, and use these Means, there is every Reason to believe that they would speedily be restored. See the 46th Canon: Ministers to confer with ~~Reluctants~~.

free himself from any Share in the Guilt, I had at-
most said the unpardonable Guilt of it, by an open
Disavowal and Discountenance. — And, for our
Encouragement in this, let us look for-
ward to that great and dreadful Day of our Lord's
second coming, "wherein the Heavens shall be dis-
solved, and the Elements shall melt with fervent
Heat;" when that Jesus, who is now the Object of
Men's Reproach and Blasphemy, shall repay Ven-
geance to his Enemies, and shall crown every faith-
ful Christian "with Honour, Glory, and Immor-
tality:" that as we have "embraced, we may ever
hold fast that blessed Hope of everlasting Life"
which is given us through his great Atonement
and powerful Mediation and Intercession for us.

Sermon

Vol. vii.

SERMON —

On the same Subject.

Further Arguments against it.

John vi. 68. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou
"hast the Words of eternal Life."

Having already shewn the Nature of Apostasy, and
evinced the Sinfulness and Danger of it, I shall now
evidence further, from these Words, the manifest Folly
and Inconsistency of it. "Lord, to whom shall we
go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life."

As Men are not at Liberty to cast off all Thoughts
of Religion, and to be absolutely without any Fear or
Sense of God in the World; that being too bold & da-
ring for any Man: so we have here insinuated to us the
Excellency and Preference of the Christian Religion.

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" (i.e) What Profes-
sion of Religion, among all the Variety of Sects and
Parties in the World, "far off from us, or nigh unto
us, from the one End of Heaven to the other," shall
we follow? — "Thou hast the Words of eternal Life."

Vol. VII.

My

My Design therefore from the Text (besides what hath been already offered *) is, in Connexion with the Context, to ground on it the following Observations,

First, That those who have once given their Names to Christ, and professed themselves his Disciples, can have no good Cause to forsake Him. — “Lord, to whom shall we go?”

Secondly, That the Defection or Apostasy of such as object to Christianity, is no Argument why Others should follow them, or imitate their Example; but rather ought to make us more cautious and careful.

Thirdly, That no Man can desert Christ and his Religion, without being infinitely a Loser by so doing; for every Person of true and unprejudiced Reason will be the more assured of the Truth of Christianity, the more and thoroughly he considers it. “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.”

First, Those who have given their Names to Christ, and professed themselves his Disciples, can have no good Cause to desert, or fall-off from him; but whatever Pretences they allege must be very weak and frivolous.

For the Proof of this we must cast an Eye upon the Context. Our Blessed Saviour, disputing with the

(*) In the preceding Discourse.

Jews, had declared that He was the Bread of Life, and that the Bread he meant was his Flesh. "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this Man give us his Flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood, ye have no Life in you" &c.

"Many of his Disciples, when they heard this, said, This is an hard Saying, who can hear it?" These Disciples were not true and thorough Converts; for if they had been, they would not have murmured at him for so trivial a Circumstance as an Expression of his which they did not understand, much less have deserted him and apostatized from him, even after he had explained himself, by informing them that what he said was not to be taken in a gross and literal, but in a spiritual and figurative Signification.

Notwithstanding which, from that Time, or (as it may very well be rendered) for that Reason, [viz] because of those Words spoken by him, "many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

It was strange and unaccountable to them, that he should be Bread, and that they should eat his Flesh.

But, was it absolutely necessary that they should understand every thing he said at first Hearing? They had seen his Miracles, heard his divine Discourses; and were so far convinced, that they joined with him,

followed him, and professed themselves his Disciples: but now leave him because of the HARD Saying which they did not understand. This was their Pretence; but if they really thought it a sufficient and rational Ground for their Defection, they argued most absurdly, and made a most unjustifiable Use of the Reason which God had given them.

A HARD Saying (supposing This to have been one) was no Argument for such a Defection, after they had incontestible outward Evidence that the Speaker came from God; by which they themselves were at first actually convinced, and did not now so much as pretend to disprove it. Besides,

Our Saviour had explained himself upon this Article, and yet they forsook him. In all Probability, therefore, the given Reason was not the real One.

Their Pride, their Lusts, and their other Vices and Corruptions, were the true Causes of their Apostasy.

They had, indeed, followed Christ, being overpowered by his Miracles and holy Life; but upon further Consideration they could not bear the Thoughts of conforming themselves to the Purity of his Doctrine, nor of suffering Shame and Persecution in the Profession of it.

And that This was, in Truth, their Case, is intimated by our Lord himself, “But there are some of you, says he,

he, that believe not." This is evidently said by Way of Blame or Reproof; and therefore it must reflect upon the Perverseness of their Wills, as their Fault; and not upon the Weakness of their Understandings, which could only be their Misfortune. "For Jesus knew from the Beginning (continues the Evangelist) who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

These Unbelievers, we see, are mentioned together with Judas the Traitor; and that he was a wicked Man, and is here mentioned as such, no One will question.

They had "in them, therefore, an evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God;" (i.e.) a corrupt vicious Heart inclining them to Unbelief; which was the real Cause of their Apostasy, tho' they made use of the weak Pretence here alleged for Want of a better. "They went out from us," says St. John upon a like Occasion, "but they were not of us," (i.e. heartily and sincerely,) "for if they had been of us, they would no Doubt have continued with us;" and this without being governed by Prejudice, or giving up the Freedom of their Thinking; there being no Manner of Reason for their quitting Christianity, but all the Reason in the World for their adhering to it the more freely and candidly they examine its Nature and Pretensions, and the Title it hath to their favourable Regard and most hearty Acceptance.

In like Manner, the Unbelievers, of these Times, raise sundry Objections from hard Sayings in the Scriptures; Difficulties, unintelligible Passages, Inconsistencies, Contradictions, &c. Now,

We ask, Do they really believe that there is any Force in these Objections, or do they not? If they do not, the thing answers itself, and we need say no more to it. If they do, they argue most absurdly, as the Apostates in our Saviour's Time, and make a most perverse and unjustifiable Use of the Reason which God hath given them.

Difficulties and Obscurities in the Scriptures we grant there are, and it hath been often proved by the most learned & able Men that it is fit there should be: (*)—but does it therefore follow that those Scriptures, (in which, for one thing difficult, there are a thousand clear & plain even to the meanest Capacities,) are not, taken altogether, the Word of God; after they have, from the plainest Facts, been demonstrated to be so?

Besides, what is difficult, and even unintelligible, to One, may not be so to another; and some of the darkest Passages have by acute and learned Men been made wonderfully clear: or if there were some appearing Inconsistencies not fully cleared, that would be no Argument

(*) See the Discourse, in this Work, on difficult Passages in Scripture vindicated, with Directions how to use them.

gument when put in Balance against plain Facts, but we may rationally believe what we do not fully understand, when God hath assured us that so it is. And even those who are really Philosophers find themselves surrounded with Mysteries, even in Nature, and in the most common Objects; and are very certain that tho' they apprehend many things, they comprehend but few.

There is nothing, then, in the Objections about Mysteries, nor indeed in any thing else which they allege. But the real hard Sayings are those which relate to Practice, not to Faith. The Men are wicked, and resolve to continue so; and (however impossible, yet) would make themselves easy, by taking Refuge in the wretched Resource of Infidelity.

This is the real Truth; and we may appeal to the whole World, even to these Men themselves, whether they do not from their Hearts believe, or rather know it to be so. The pure Doctrine of Christ opposes their Corruptions, and therefore they oppose it; they "go back, and walk no more with him." But then,

Secondly, Such their Defection and Apostasy is no Argument why Others should follow them, or imitate their Example; but it should make us more cautious and careful.

The general Cause of Apostasy, as we have seen, is Wickedness; we need not, therefore, much in Proof

of what is here asserted: for This is so plain in Reason, that were not the Prevalence of ill Examples very great in Fact, we could not without Absurdity insist upon it.

"We must not follow a Multitude to do Evil." Examples, mere Examples, even of the best Men, are no direct Rule of Conscience, much less the Examples of the world. — Is their Defection itself an Argument for their Defection? And because they have left Christ and us, is it a Consequence that we ought to follow them?

They may, perhaps, approve of their Conduct, as just and right, and consequently expect that we should yield the Point to them: we also think our Cause good, and require their Submission to us. In Truth, therefore, as their Defection itself is no Argument on their Side; so neither is it any Argument on our's. The Use we should make of it, therefore, is this, [viz] that we be more careful and cautious, and more diligent in examining "whether these things are so." For,

We are so far from persuading Men to believe blindly, and without thinking or proving; that we persuade them to the direct contrary. And upon the Occasion of Apostasy in particular, they not only may, but ought to inquire the more, with more than ordinary Diligence and Application, that they may not only hold-fast, but

be

be able to defend their Religion, and be "ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh them a Reason of the Faith and Hope that is in them."

Reason, true, right, and unprejudiced Reason is the best Judge between us and our Adversaries. It is the Province of Reason to judge of Revelation, so far as to determine upon the Evidence, whether it be a true Revelation, and really came from God, or not; though, when That is once proved, the same Reason tells us that we ought to receive and embrace as a Truth whatever God says, notwithstanding some things He says may be above our Comprehension. For it amounts to no more than this, that we allow His Thoughts to be superior to ours, submit to his Authority, and take some things upon Trust from him who can neither deceive, nor be deceived. Let his and our Adversaries argue as much, and think as freely, as they please; the more the better: provided always, that it be real Free-thinking, and that they be not (as they are at present) Slaves to Prejudice and Partiality; and really argue, and not cavil, "doting about Words and Questions which will not profit." Let them speak to the Facts, if they will speak to the Purpose; the Facts which we allege as Proofs, even to a Demonstration, that the Christian Religion is true. (*) Facts

(*) See these Facts or Evidences, briefly spoken to, in Vol. vi.

Facts are plain things, and a Child can apprehend them; but cavelling is endless, and Fools may cavil about any thing. — As these Men's renouncing the Christian Faith, therefore, is no Argument either Way, the Use we should make of it should be, to excite our Care and Caution, & more thoroughly consider the Grounds and Motives of our Faith. Which brings me to shew,

Thirdly, That no Man can forsake Christ, and his Religion, without being infinitely a Loser by so doing; and every Person of unprejudiced Reason will be the more assured of the Truth of Christianity, the more thoroughly and deeply he considers it. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life." — The first Branch of this Head (for the other will afterwards naturally follow) I shall consider in a three-fold Respect:

- 1st. As to Revealed Religion in general.
- 2^{dly}, As to the Christian Religion in particular. And then more particularly,
- 3^{dly}, As to the Immortality of the Soul, and a future eternal State after Death. And,
- 1st. As to divine Revelation, or Revealed Religion in general: the Benefit of which is truly evident. Those who call themselves DEISTS, must, by their very Name, acknowledge there is a God. And when

God

God himself is pleased to be their Guide, will they refuse to be guided by Him? Or can they have a surer Direction than that of infinite Wisdom & Goodness? (*)

The

(*) The Aptnesses or Fitnesses of things, it seems, are to answer all Difficulties: by These even the Laws of God are to be judged of; and to be rejected, if what they command be not apt and fit in itself, and agreeable to the Nature and Reasons of things. Doubtless, God commands nothing but what is apt and fit; but who can best judge of That Aptness and Fitness? He, or we? Nay, what is Aptness and Fitness? These Men would fain have every thing else referred to it; but sure it is itself a *relative* Notion; for to be apt and fit must relate to some Rule, Measure, or Standard, upon which that Aptness and Fitness depends. And what should that Rule be in the Case we are now considering? The Reason of Man, or the Wisdom of God? The latter, One would imagine.

In the Infinite Mind of the absolutely perfect Being are the Archetypes, the Patterns, or (if you please) the Reasons of all things; and every thing is congruous, or incongruous, as it agrees, or disagrees, with those original Standards. When therefore we can once prove that He has commanded This or That, we ought not to argue that, it is not apt or fit, and therefore we ought to reject it; but thus, it is apt and fit because God has commanded it, and therefore we ought not to reject it. — Again,

When these mighty Philosophers talk so much about the Law of Nature, we ask them, What do they mean by the Word Law? A Law improperly so called, as when we say the Law of Motion, of Gravitation, &c. meaning no more by it than a certain Order and Tendency in the natural Course of things? If so, they talk about what is nothing to the Purpose: for the Dispute between us and them is about something of a quite different Kind. Not but that (by the Way) even these Fitnesses and Aptnesses come from God, as Creator, (though not as Legislator,) and upon him alone entirely depend.

The wisest of the Heathen Philosophers, for whom

these

If then by the Word Law they understand (as they ought to do, if they will speak to the Point) a Law strictly and properly so called, (i.e.) a Rule of Action given to Moral Agents, we ask them,

adly, What do they mean by the Word *Nature*? The Complication of Properties in the several Species of Beings, as when we say the Nature of Man, of a Brute, of Gold, and the like; If they do, how can a Law be given as a Rule of moral Actions by such a Nature as this? If by Nature they mean the *God of Nature*, as the Word is very often used both in Philosophy and Divinity, and even in common Discourse, and must be used here, if we talk Sense, and to the Purpose; then the Law of Nature is itself the Law of God: as indeed it is, though not a *Written* one, but either *revealed* to our first Parents immediately after their Creation, and so delivered downwards to Posterity; or *innate* and impressed upon our Minds; or being of itself so plain and luminous, that by the common Use of our natural uncorrupted Faculties we must needs discover it, and assent to it. — But how insufficient this Law is, as it Now stands, must be evident to all who make a true Use of their Reason, or will even believe plain Fact, and their own Experience.

Our Adversaries then say, they have Natural Religion: be it so, yet it will not do; it is blind, dark, uncertain, miserably corrupted and depraved. Nor will the Doctrine of Aptnesses and Fitnesses in the least improve it; for what is it, but a mere empty Sound of Words without any Meaning? for, will all Mankind agree in their Notion of these Aptnesses and Fitnesses; One shall think that to be apt and fit which another thinks to be quite otherwise. Set aside the *written* Law of God, this Man shall judge it very apt and fit (because he likes it) to give a Loose to Drunkness & Lewdness as often as he pleases. Another, not being addicted to those Vices, shall condemn them as incongruous, & disagreeable to the System of things; but he shall think it extremely apt and fit to lie, to cheat, and steal; those

these Men would appear to have so great a Veneration,
 were

those Practices are agreeable to the Nature of things, because they are agreeable to his own Nature, (i.e.) his own Inclinations. Much the same may be said of that sovereign Dictator *Reason*, so much celebrated and magnified of late. Reason! What Reason? and whose Reason? For does not one Man's Reason tell him This, and another's That? we grant the general Faculty of Reason is the same in all. But do particular Persons make the same Use of it as to particular things; Do they not judge diversely, and quite contrary to one another; we grant likewise that there are some Propositions which all Mankind agree in, as soon as the Terms are heard and understood; also some practical and moral Propositions, in which all who have any Religion agree; we grant further, that Reason is itself a most noble Faculty; that it argues justly, and concludes rightly, in many Instances; and Particularly that it may and ought to judge of the Truth of Revelation itself. But what is all this to the innumerable contrary Judgments that are and ever have been made, and in nothing more, nor so much, as in Morality and Religion? And now, *Quis custodiet ipsos Custodes?* Who shall guide this Guide, human Reason? God surely, if it will be guided by him. If it will not, if some Men think their Reason too good to be guided by him, that is wholly to themselves. God has done his Part; he has given his revealed Will, committed to writing, in a Body of plain Laws, to be a Rule and Direction for all. In these nothing can be unjust, because he is infinitely just; nothing hard or rigorous, because he is infinitely good; nothing erroneous or false, unapt or unfit, because he is infinitely wise, and is himself the Pattern and Standard of all Truth and Congruity.

Here likewise as the Lawgiver is God, (for we Christians when we speak of Laws have always a View to a Legislator, though our Adversaries upon the Subject of their Aptnesses and Fitnesses seem not to have any such Notion, but talk most wildly and unaccount-

were sensible of their own Blindness, and Want of a Revelation from the Supreme Being; and declared there could be no solid Assurance or Satisfaction without it. And shall we, who have such a Revelation, reject it after we have it? But,

2dly, As to the Christian Revelation, or Religion in particular, much needs not be spoken; because what has been already urged is applicable here, only with this Addition, that of all Revelations the Christian is the best; which our Adversaries themselves, did they acknowledge any Revelation at all, we suppose would not deny. They do not find fault with it, we think, on the Account of any Deficiency, either with Regard to Faith or Practice. According to them, it is rather redundant, than deficient; containing not too little, but too much. It is, indeed, a perfect System of Morality, or practical Religion. No Laws can be delivered more clearly, or be guarded with stronger Sanctions of Rewards

ably in that Respect) we say, as the Lawgiver is God, who surely has sufficient Authority over us, so the Laws are certain, fixed, determined; and by these the various, fluctuating, contradictory Opinions of Men are to be settled and adjusted. They are innumerable, but God is one; they are subject to endless Errors, but he is infallible. Should we not then adhere to his Laws, rather than to our own uncertain Reason? Whether we should, or not, let Reason itself judge.

Rewards and Punishments. (*) These last our Adversaries are so far from not acknowledging to be threatened in the Gospel, that they are the very Ground and Foundation of their Aversion to it. They cannot bear the Thoughts of being punished, especially to all Eternity; and therefore have taken much Pains to prove, or rather have over and over confidently affirmed, that God cannot punish, or that to inflict Pain upon his Creatures, is contrary to his Nature.

But let it be observed, that, by such their Assertion, they contradict the Scriptures, which we have often demonstrated to be the Word of God. (†) But,

Why

(*) The Law of Nature, be it what it will, is not so clear and explicit as the Gospel of Christ. For the Truth of which Assertion we must appeal to all who know any thing of the Law of Nature, and have read the New Testament; which is all the Argument or Proof the thing will admit of, except an Induction of Particulars; a Specimen of which might easily be given. — See the fifth Chapter of St. Matthew,

(†) All Persons whatsoever should be infinitely careful that they ruin not themselves by bewildering and confounding their Thoughts with such vain Speculations as these; how eternal Punishments can be reconciled with the Justice and Goodness of God; whether, considering the Wickedness of the World, and how few comparatively seem likely to be saved, it were not better upon the whole that there were no future State at all, &c. It is certainly fit it should be so, because in Fact it is so: God cannot cease to be just and good,

Why are they so terrified with the Threatnings contained in the Gospel, and at the same Time over-look the Promises and Alleviations of it; for, upon our Violation of his Laws, lest we should give ourselves up to Despondency and Desperation, he has by the Gospel graciously provided a Remedy for Sin, [viz] Repentance; and upon That has declared that he will be reconciled to the Sinner, freely pardon and forgive him, and receive him into his Favour, as if he had never offended. And, All this through the Merits, Mediation, and Intercession of Jesus Christ, who "died to save even the chief of Sinners."

Thus is infinite Justice satisfied, and infinite Mercy extended. And all these things are proper and peculiar to the Christian Religion; nor can any other Dispensation whatsoever pretend to any one of them.

If we, therefore, forsake Christ, "to whom indeed shall we go? For who," like him, "has these Words of eternal Life?" But more particularly,

3dly, As to the Immortality of the Soul, and a future everlasting State, which the best and wisest of the ancient Heathen Philosophers rather believed, upon the Dictates of their own natural Reason, heartily wished

though most Men's Understandings are weak, and all Men's finite; and few can in any Degree, none perhaps can fully, account for these things in Point of Reason.

wished for, and panted after a full Assurance of it; but still were full of Doubts, Uncertainities, and Perplexities concerning it. (*) But now Christianity hath cleared all this: "Christ hath abolished Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel." (†) — And now, What

(*) Great is the Difference between an ancient Heathen, and a modern One, between a Heathen *before* Christianity, and a Heathen *since* Christianity; between a Heathen who *never* was a Christian, and a Heathen who has apostatized from Christianity. The former (we speak of the wisest and best of them) being virtuously disposed, longed for an Assurance of Immortality, but could not obtain it; the latter being viciously disposed, having the fullest Assurance of Immortality; but most ungratefully, obstinately, and profanely, reject it: doubtless, (however these Men may call Us Believers narrow-souled) it is verily believed that many wise, great, and good Men among the Pagans are now in a State of Happiness, through the Merits of That Christ of whom they were ignorant, since they were virtuous according to the best of their Knowledge, tho' they have no Title to the Christian Salvation, as not being included within the Covenant of Grace: but as for these Infidels among us who oppose the clearest Light of the Gospel, it cannot be but that without the severest Repentance & Renunciation of their Errors, eternal Misery must inevitably be their Portion.

(‡) If we consider the Immortality of the Soul, and a future eternal State, what Comfort has the Infidel who denies it? He proposes and hopes to be nothing after Death: and is this a noble Comfort for a rational Creature, and a Philosopher? They are pleased to call Believers Men of narrow Souls, of little and contracted Notions; and themselves the only generous, as well as free, Thinkers.

What Comfort or solid Support has the Infidel in any One of these Respects, while he opposes Revealed Religion in general, the Christian in particular, and the Immortality of the Soul yet more particularly? Is Human Reason better than Divine Wisdom, and Natural Religion than Revealed? Certainly God is more able to direct us, than we are to direct ourselves, or one another: and his Laws must be much more clear, plain and distinct when committed to Writing, than they can be in the Religion of Nature, miserably depraved and corrupted as it now is: and the more gracious and perfect the Revelation is, as is the Case of the Christian, is it not so much the better? but if all these things signify nothing, and he is to die like the Beasts that perish,

But can any thing be more ungenerous, narrow-souled and base, any thing more unworthy of a Man, than That Principle of their's, to wish and desire that they may die like Beasts? — Do we, on the contrary, deserve that Charge for hoping and believing that we shall be immortal, and live to Eternity? But, The real Truth is, They abhor the Thoughts of a future State; because, if there be One, they know they shall be miserable in it. And to them, we confess, and to all others, who are, and are resolved to continue wicked, a future State is no comfortable Consideration.

But why are they wicked? Why do they not, by the true Faith and Practice of Christian Virtues, make the Soul's Immortality Matter of Rejoicing to them, instead of Terror? For, to this End was it revealed, that we might live like those who believe this State, and hope to be Partakers of it: "and such Comfort have all the Saints."

in what Respects is he better than they? only of a little higher Make, but of equally short and uncertain Continuance.

Sermon

That and Therefore for it, answered.

John vi. 68. Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.

The Supremacy of Revelation above Reason, and the Authority of Christianity in particular, and more particularly, and immutability of the Soul, and a Divine Revelation, already proved from these Words.

But I shall answer all Objections against it.

The first Objection is, that when we are speaking to a World of uneducated People, a common Sense, fit for the Objects of Reason, as some of them are capable to receive, is not to be used, but their own foolish, depraved, prejudiced Notions, or Opinions, which are all that they are capable of.

To this the Answer is, that Reason and Revelation are both necessary, and that the former is the Foundation, and the latter the Superstructure. Without Reason, Revelation is of no Use, and without Revelation, Reason is of no Use.

SERMON

On the same Subject.

Pleas and Pretences for it, answered.

John vi. 68. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou
"hast the Words of eternal Life."

The Superiority of Revelation above Reason, and
the Excellency of Christianity in particular, and more
particularly the Immortality of the Soul, and a fu-
ture everlasting State, being already proved from these
Words, I come now,

Lastly, To obviate all Pretences against it.

The miserable Men of whom we are speaking, to a-
void that dreadful Thought, a future State, set up the
Oracles of Reason, (as some of them are pleased to ex-
press themselves) i.e. their own foolish, depraved, pre-
judiced Reason, in Opposition to the real and lively
Oracles of Divine Revelation. But,

To shew the Insufficiency of mere Reason and Na-
tural Religion, as corrupted since the Fall of Man,
we urge the abominable Wickedness and Immorality

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of

of the Heathen World in general, and even of the Heathen Philosophers, most of them at least, in particular.

To this they answer, that Vice and Wickedness reign among Christians, as well as among Pagans; and therefore this is as good an Argument against the Gospel, as against human Reason.—But are they in earnest?

We ask them, 1st. Does Vice reign so much among Christians, as it did and does among Pagans? or any thing like it? If they affirm that it does, they affirm what the whole World knows to be false; and all they have to support their Assertion is, their alleging some unwary rhetorical Expressions of some few particular Divines in a declamatory and hyperbolical Way, inveighing against the Wickedness and Corruption of Christians. To which we reply, that those Expressions are false in themselves, and imprudently uttered: and what is this to the Truth or Merits of the Cause?

2^{dly}. The Heathens, some even of the wisest & best among them, were vicious upon Principle, as well as in Practice. Their Religion itself was immoral; they taught for Doctrines the grossest Crimes; as Idolatry, Fornication, the exposing & murdering of Infants, &c.

Are such Doctrines, or indeed any immoral Doctrines whatsoever, taught in the Gospel? Nothing like it, but the direct contrary. This being so, the Wick-

edness of the Christian World (which we own to be very great, though not near so great as that of the Pagan) is no Argument against Christianity: for if the Violation of a Law be a Proof that it is not a good Law, there never was a good Law made either by God or Man. Here, by the Way, occurs another of their Reasonings. They argue against the Gospel from the ill Lives of Multitudes who profess it. But does it follow, that the Gospel is insufficient, because it is not irresistible? If it were irresistible, there would be an End of Free-will, and consequently of all Virtue. It is sufficient, because it wants nothing which it ought to have: but it ought not to be irresistible for the Reason now mentioned. — 3^dy, We see the Gospel with our Eyes, and find it to be always one and the same, fixed and determined: consequently, are sure that the Wickedness of the World is a Violation of it, and therefore not chargeable upon it. Can the same be said of Reason? That we cannot see it, or read it in a Book, will, we hope, be granted: and its miserable Uncertainty in the Use made of it by particular Persons has been already taken-notice of. We may therefore be very sure, that the Wickedness of those who have no other Guide or Law than this, must be in a great Measure owing to the Insufficiency of that Guide or Law, and to their Want of a Better. Here again we may

may well ask, Where is the Law-giver? What Authority has one Man's Reason over another, or indeed over himself? It may be a Guide, or if you please to make a Law, in a loose, wide, and analogical Sense, meaning by it a mere Rule or Direction; but not a Law, strictly and properly speaking: because, according to this Scheme, there is no Law-giver. For a Law-giver must be a Being or Person distinct from him to whom the Law is given, and have Authority to command and punish him. But,

We shall be told, that all we have said upon the Usefulness and Excellence of Revelation and Christianity, signifies nothing; because we proceed upon a false Supposition, and imagine That to be in being which really is not: there is no Probability, say they, of Revelation in general, nor Proof of the Christian in particular.

To the first Part of this mere Assertion without the least Proof, we answer 1st. *a posteriori*; It cannot be improbable in Reason, because it is certain in Facts.

2^{dly}, *a priori*: It is so far from being improbable that God should reveal his Will to Mankind, that it is vastly absurd to suppose he should not; It is inconsistent with the infinite Wisdom, and other Perfections of the Divine Nature.

God is the Sovereign of the Universe, and all Mankind are his Subjects: and is it not contrary even to human Wisdom, Goodness, and Justice, for a Prince to govern his Subjects without giving them Laws, or making known his Will to them?

But perhaps it will be said by these Men, as it was by the Epicurean Deists before them, That God never intended to govern us at all, nor to reward or punish us, nor in the least to concern himself about us. — Why then did he give us these noble Faculties of Reasoning and Thinking, Judging and Understanding; and make us capable of being governed, rewarded, & punished?

According to this Account, He gave us those Faculties in vain, which is contrary to his Nature. We by Experience find in ourselves such Excellencies as make us deserve the peculiar Care of the Supreme Being. We see manifest Marks of God's Wisdom & Providence in the Guidance of the material World, of Beings far inferior to us: and shall We, the Head of the visible Creation, who are a Kind of Gods in Comparison of the highest Brute, be utterly neglected and disregarded by him?

But here, as in most of our Disputes with these unreasonable Men, we have little more to do, than appeal to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. For, without proving any thing themselves, they put

as to the Proof of such things as are scarce capable of being proved, not because they are too difficult, but too easy: because we have hardly any thing plainer to prove them by.

From Speculation, therefore, let us go on to Facts; which are stubborn things, and not easily cavilled or argued out of the World.

It is insinuated then, in the second Place, that there is no Proof of the Christian Revelation in particular. No? We thought there had. We thought we had proved, even to a Demonstration, that it is certainly true, nay impossible to be false. Must we repeat them, and go over all again? So these People seem to expect. But is there any Sense or Reason in this? Must we be continually proving the same thing, which hath been already proved a thousand Times over, because they are resolved to be constantly cavelling, and forever asserting and denying, without proving or disproving any thing at all?

We refer, therefore, to what we have already demonstrated: and say, the more any unprejudiced Person considers the Evidence for Christianity, the more he will be convinced of its Truth.

Have they disproved this? No; they have not so much as pretended to it. All therefore we further add, is to observe, that as they never have disproved these

Facts, so it impossible they ever should : for how will they proceed ? How will they prove this Negative, that those things were not done, which we have proved were done ? How will they set about it ?

History tells us, (for Instance,) and it was never questioned by any One, that there was such a Prince as ALEXANDER the Great, that he overthrew the Persian Monarchy, conquered Part of India, &c.

Now here is a Man, suppose, takes it into his Head that all this is false; at least he says it is : we would fain know how he will prove it to be false, even supposing it were so.

In like Manner we affirm, from the Faith of History, and the common Principles upon which all Mankind proceed in Matters of this Nature, that in the Reigns of AUGUSTUS and TIBERIUS, Emperors of ROME, (*) much later than the Days of ALEXANDER, there were such Persons as JESUS CHRIST, and twelve Men called his Apostles; that they did such and such things, and some of them wrote certain Books.

How will our Adversaries disprove this ? They will answer, perhaps, that there is a great Difference between the two Cases; the Facts concerning Alexander, and those concerning Christ and his Apostles.

There is indeed : because there is ten Times more Evidence

(*) Imperante Augusto natus est CHRISTUS, Tiberio crucifixus.

Evidence for the Truth of the latter, than of the former. Yes, but the latter were WONDERFUL and ASTONISHING. They were so: otherwise they would have signified nothing, and we could now make no Use of them. But because a Thing is wonderful and strange, is it therefore incredible, after it hath been demonstrated to be true, nay impossible to be false? Is it such a Wonder, that there should be some WONDERFUL things? Events or Occurrences unusual, and out of the ordinary Course, are what we commonly call strange and wonderful: but that God should always be able, and sometimes willing, to do such things, is not strange or wonderful at all.

We see nothing therefore that can help the Cause of our Adversaries, but their proving that the Facts we contend for are impossible, as implying a Contradiction in Reason and Nature. All short of this is vain and impertinent. And is it a Contradiction that He who created the World should always be able, and upon so necessary an Occasion as revealing his Will to Mankind, should think it fit actually to suspend or alter the Course of it, in some particular Instances, so as to work what we call Miracles? Is it a Contradiction that infinite Power & Wisdom in Conjunction should, upon such an Occasion, in a Moment heal the Sick, preternaturally darken the Sun, or raise the Dead? If

these Men think it is, let them endeavour to prove it; and then it will be Time enough for us to answer them.

The Usefulness and Excellency, the Truth and Certainty of Revelation and Christianity being thus established, to whom should we go after having deserted Christ? or what shall we get by such a Desertion? Nay, suppose it had not "the Words of eternal Life;" suppose his Religion were not true, or not good; "to whom shall we go" for a truer, or a better? or what shall we gain by having none at all? The Falseness and Insufficiency of all other Religions, the Weakness of human Reason, and the Madness and Misery of having no Religion, are Points which have been fully considered. Supposing our's were not true, eternal Life however is a pleasing Thought to good Men; and it is both pleasant and profitable to be good, even with Respect to this Life. (*)

Could our Infidels be sure that there is no future State, they might so far make themselves easy, as they love to speak: but That they cannot be.

Here again we make the same Observation as before:

(*) The Immortality of the Soul was so agreeable a Contemplation to the great Cato in Tully, that "If in this I err, says he, that I believe the Souls of Men to be immortal, I err willingly and gladly; nor while I live will I have this Error, with which I am so delighted, extorted from me." They are his own Words, as there represented.

fore: we say we can, and have proved, probably from Reason; certainly from Scripture, that there is a future State: but it is impossible for them to prove there is none, even supposing there were none; and therefore, to put it at the very lowest, they cannot but have anxious and fearfully misgiving Thoughts, lest, in the Issue, they should by dreadful Experience find and feel that there is One. And for the Truth of this we appeal to the common Reason of all Mankind.

What is it therefore that these miserable Men pretend to, and value themselves upon? A generous Attempt, they say, to free Mankind from slavish Fears, infused into them by Superstition, (i.e.) Christianity. But they cannot do it; the thing is impossible. They cannot so much as free themselves from those slavish Fears, if they must be so called.

But though a Man cannot be sure that Christianity is false, even supposing it were false; yet he may, if he pleases, be sure that it is true: the Arguments for it being demonstrative, as has been already shewn. And being so assured, and living accordingly, he will make himself easy indeed, and it is impossible he should be so any other Way.

But our Unbelievers leave Christ, without considering to whom they should or can go. They talk indeed of Natural Religion, but in Truth they mean no

Religion. They extol Reason, and at the same Time argue contrary to it, while they make it their Business to vilify Revelation. For Reason and Revelation are mutual Friends: Reason proves the Truth of Revelation, and Revelation assists and improves Reason.

Even the Religion and Morality of the ancient Heathen, so far as it could approve itself to right Reason, was in great Measure owing to Revelation; either to an original One given to our first Parents, and delivered down by Tradition; or to the holy Scriptures themselves, from which they had some Notices, either by reading them, or by their Conversation with Jews or Christians, or both. And these pretended Rationalists of ours could not talk as they do of the Beauty and Excellence of Natural Religion, had they not borrowed their Notions from the Word of God: This is evident from the extreme Ignorance of the whole Heathen World. Modern Unbelievers therefore, in Christian Nations, act very unworthily, when they obstinately oppose that revealed Religion, from whence alone they have borrowed even the PHILOSOPHY they pretend to; thus basely and ungratefully turning those Arms, which they stole from the Word of God against the Word of God (under) God them all naturally tend; where is their Morality in their Way and Manner of arguing and writing against Christi-

Christianity. In gross fraudulent Quotations, in misrepresenting the Sense of Authors both human and divine; in the most malicious Invectives against the whole Body of the Clergy; in charging them with the foulest Crimes; of which they know they are innocent; in calumniating God's Ministers; and blaspheming God himself? This is the Morality of a Deist; but surely the Morality of a Christian is much better.

This is an Inconsistency between their Discourses and their Practice, in the very Management of them. But we shall now take notice of another in their Discourses themselves, or at least of a shameful Prevarication, and a most perfidious Abuse of Words, to deceive ignorant and unwary Readers.

They make use of the Words Christianity and the Gospel as we do; supposing, (one would think,) that there are such things, and that they are really good; as when they say, Christianity is as old as the Creation; and the Gospel a Republication of the Law of Nature, &c. And yet they lay down such Maxims as suppose there neither are, nor ever were any such things, or manifestly tend to overturn and destroy them. For however ancient Christianity may be, we ask, whether, as things now stand, it be possible for it to subsist without the Old and New Testament? And whether, according to the New Testament, it be possible for it

to subsist without those positive Institutions, as the two Sacraments, the Constitution of a Church, and the Offices of Ministers in it, which are enjoined in the New Testament, and which our Adversaries make their utmost Efforts to destroy; declaring that God, by his Laws, cannot make any Addition to the Law of Nature. Then, in their Argumentations upon this Head, they take no Notice of Original Sin, and the Redemption of Mankind by the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ; upon which the Scheme of Christianity turns, and which are the Grounds and Reasons of those positive Institutions.

It would be endless to remark upon all their Inconsistencies and Absurdities, or upon their Prevarications and fraudulent Dealings; yet we shall just mention one or two more; and the rather, because the Detection of them will further shew the Weakness and Insufficiency of something which they would resort to, after having deserted Christ and his Religion.

They tell us the native Beauty of Virtue will do the WHOLE Business of Morality, and therefore, there is no Occasion for any Revelation.

But 1st, They are inconsistent with themselves: they extol the Loveliness of Virtue, and yet argue for, and promote the Cause of Vice.

adly,

edly, The native Beauties of Virtue, the undoubtedly very great, and acknowledged by all, are not sufficient to make Mankind virtuous, in this our miserably corrupted State. We find it to be so by Experience, and That can never deceive us.

Those Beauties, even when aided and assisted, as they now are, by the Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments, do not make all, no, nor the greatest Part of those who believe them, truly virtuous: how much less shall they do it of themselves!

The next Thing they would set-up in Lieu of Christianity, and in Opposition to it, is HONOUR.

This, if it be any thing, is a faint Image of Virtue, at best: otherwise it is a mere Phantom, and a mere Nothing. Those who most pretend to extraordinary Honour make no Scruple of breaking through all the Ties of common Honesty. Such a Man will squander away his Estate in Luxury, but will not pay his Debts, till he is forced to it; and that too by the Ruin of his Creditors: except Debts contracted by Gaming; for those, it seems, are Debts of Honour. He will not take the Lie, but he will Tell a Lie, or a thousand Lies, if he thinks his Purpose can be served by so doing. He will do nothing dishonourable, but he will murder any Man who shall reflect upon his pretended Honour, though never so justly; provided the Word

DUEL can be dextrously applied to the Murder, so as to make it, in the Language of Honour, no Murder at all.

Upon the Whole, In Consideration both of the Truth and Excellence of Christianity, we had much better adhere to Christ, than forsake him. What good Effects has Infidelity produced in this Nation? Are we the richer, or in any Respect the happier for it? Do our Affairs, either private or public, at home or abroad, succeed more prosperously, since this Deluge of Profaneness has broke in upon us? Is Commerce increased by it, or does it thrive and flourish the more on its Account? Are the great Duties of public Life carried on more faithfully, or private Happiness increased by it? Are Children more obedient to their Parents, or Servants to their Masters? Is Self-murder, as well as all other Sorts of Murder, less frequent? And cannot the same be said of Robberies, Burnings, and Violence of all Kinds? we have instanced particularly in private Matters; we just mentioned indeed something of public Ones. If those are (as we are told they are) in the Height of Prosperity, yet we absolutely deny that this Happiness is owing to Infidelity. It is not BECAUSE of, but NOTWITHSTANDING Infidelity; and it must be owing to some other Cause than

That,

That, whatever the Cause be. But whatever is to be said of these Matters, certain it is (as we have fully shewn) that upon the Whole, with Regard both to this Life and the next, he is somewhat more than ordinarily unreasonable, who (in the midst of so clear a Revelation) will "go back from Christ, and walk no more with him."

The End of the Seventh Volume.
